

# UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

## *Exploring the value of (Spiritually) Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting ordained persons in ministry*

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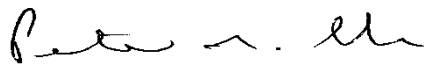
**April 2016**

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## **DEDICATION**

This Thesis is dedicated to my wonderful father, Revd Peter Madsen Gubi, M.A. - a huge inspiration in my life - and to my grandfather, Bishop Peter Madsen Gubi, Ep. Fra., whom I wish I had known better in my lifetime.

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# UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

## ABSTRACT

*Exploring the value of (Spiritually) Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting ordained persons in ministry*

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In response to the Church of England's (2014) 'Formation Criteria for Ordained Ministry' and to research that indicates the prevalence of poor psychological wellbeing of clergy, this thesis uses Swinton and Mowat's model of Practical Theological Reflection to explore whether utilising Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands, and in supporting clergy, would be beneficial. A Spiritually Reflexive Group is defined as '*a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level*'. The research discovers current practice in the use of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in ordinand training and in the support of clergy in the Church of England, and examines how Spiritually Reflexive Groups might be understood theologically. A mixed methods approach is used in three phases. Phase one examines how reflexivity is developed in the Church of England's Theological Education Institutions through an analysis of narratives provided by Principals of recognised theological institutions ( $n= 11$ ). Phase two explores current practice in the use of Reflective Groups to support Church of England clergy by interviewing Bishops' Advisors for Pastoral Care and Counselling ( $n= 8$ ). These data were analysed through an interpretative phenomenological analysis. In phase three, an online survey of Reflective Group participants' experiences ( $n= 37$ ) from three dioceses was analysed. The data from the theological institutions reveal that some group work is used in developing reflexivity, but it is limited in enabling '*deep learning*'. The data from the Bishops' Advisors reveal that Reflective Groups are psychologically beneficial to clergy, as do the data from the Reflective Group participants. However, the theological/spiritual is seldom facilitated in these groups. The Thesis argues that given the necessity of spirituality in fostering good psychological wellbeing in clergy, Reflective Groups need to recapture this missing element. The research concludes that theological institutions can benefit ordinands through the implementation of (Spiritually) Reflexive Groups as a method of theological reflection, and as a way of developing self-awareness and enculturating attitudes towards resilience and self-care. These attitudes and way of reflecting theologically can then be taken into ordained ministry as psychologically- and spiritually- healthy practice. A 'foci for reflexivity' in facilitating (Spiritually) Reflexive Groups and utilising them effectively is offered.

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# Introduction

“Their vocation is to be a human being – and that’s not separate from being a priest” (BA6<sup>1</sup>).

## 0.1 Setting the context

This Thesis uses Swinton and Mowat’s (2006, p. 95) model of Practical Theological Reflection to explore whether utilising Spiritually Reflexive Groups (SRGs) in the training of ordinands, and in supporting clergy, as a form of ‘divine pedagogy’<sup>2</sup> (Charry, 1997), would be beneficial. The research seeks to discover current practice in the use of SRGs in theological training and in the support of clergy in the Church of England (CofE), and examines how SRGs might be understood theologically.

A SRG is defined as ‘a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity<sup>3</sup> can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level’ (Gubi, 2011, p. 50).

## 0.2 Developing as a Reflexive Practitioner

Whilst Ixer (1999; 2010) questions the ‘speculative and conjectural nature’ of reflective practice, the importance of becoming a ‘Reflective (or Reflexive) Practitioner’ is increasingly promoted in many helping professions, e.g. Nursing, Teaching, Social Work, Mental Health (Bolton, 2014; Dawber, 2013; Edmunds, 2012; Collins, 2011; Omer and McCarthy, 2010; Mann, Gordon and Macleod, 2009; Thompson and Thompson, 2008; Schön, 1984; 1991). Some argue the difference between ‘*reflective*’ and ‘*reflexive*’ (e.g. Bolton, 2014; Walton, 2014). Bolton (2014) states that ‘reflection’ is about bringing experiences into focus by using the ‘why’ question from as many angles as possible, whereas ‘reflexive’ is more about questioning our own attitudes, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions, and how congruent our actions are with our espoused values and theories (p. 7).

With reference to the work of Giddens (1991) and Heelas and Woodhead (2005), Walton (2014)

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<sup>1</sup> See **Section 3.1** for an explanation of the coding.

<sup>2</sup> Charry (1997, p.18) refers to the concept of ‘divine pedagogy’ as the means by which theology is developed, that informs the processes which enable the formation of character, and assists in the building and maintaining the community of faith, and enables the communication of that faith to the wider world.

<sup>3</sup> Rennie (1998, pp.2-3) defines reflexivity as ‘the ability to think about ourselves, to think about our thinking, to feel about our feelings, to treat ourselves as objects of our attention and to use what we find there as a point of departure in deciding what to do next’. Hertz (1997, ppvii-xviii) describes reflexivity as ‘an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment’. Walton (2014, p. xvi) states that the types of questions that reflexive enquirers ask of themselves include: ‘How does my personal history generate presuppositions that influence my approach to this topic? How does my gender/ class/ ethnicity/ sexual identity/ cultural location influence my understanding? Where do my allegiances lie, and how do my commitments guide my approach to inquiry? What can my body and my emotional responses contribute to generating the knowledge I seek?’

states that reflexivity is a postmodern epistemology (i.e. way of knowing or generating new knowledge) consisting of being true to oneself and giving attention to the place of one's life experience (or psychological process) in the emergence of new insight. However, Walton cautions that whilst this experience in a spiritual frame may bring us closer to the heart of the Christian mystery, 'it can also be a problematic process that owes as much to the questionable forms of idealism that are part of the romantic movement, as it does to prayerful devotion or curious theological creativity' (p. xvi).

In this Thesis, the terms '*Reflective*' and '*Reflexive*' will be used interchangeably. This is because the research participants<sup>4</sup>, and sometimes the literature, use the terms interchangeably, although throughout the Thesis, the focus will be more on developing reflexivity. Reflexive Practice enables the development of one's ability to understand the part that one plays in a situation, and what one brings to an encounter with others, enabling the formation of deeper insight and relationality, and a more developed ability to deal with, and survive, complex situations – thus enabling better care, quality of encounter and self-care. In a ministerial context, Reflexive Practice can enable better preaching (Long, 2004; Craddock, 2002; Day, 1998; Schlafer, 1992; Buechner, 1977), self-care (Burton and Burton, 2009; Lee and Horsman, 2002), pastoral encounters (Kelly, 2012; Lyall, 2001; 2009; Willows and Swinton, 2000; Nouwen, 1979), and missional leadership (Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway, 2012)<sup>5</sup>. Nash (2011) argues that reflexivity enables 'regenerative practice'<sup>6</sup>.

Theological Education within the CofE has undergone many changes over the past hundred years (Reiss, 2013) and, in recent years, it has become increasingly important for ordinands in the CofE to become reflexive practitioners, as is evidenced from the Church of England's (2014, pp. 10-15) recent 'Formation Criteria for Ordained Ministry'. Quoting extensively and directly from their criteria, the CofE requires that by the end of the Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Phase 1, which is undertaken in their recognised Theological Education Institutions (TEI), ordinands in training are increasingly able to:

- "discern God's presence and activity in the lives of others and in the wider world;
- balance care for others with care for self, including an openness to spiritual direction and support from others;

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<sup>4</sup> It will be evident later in the Thesis that whilst groups that are referred to by the participants are labelled 'Reflective', the process of insight and learning that is facilitated in them is more *reflexive*.

<sup>5</sup> Gubi (in press) offers a fuller exploration of these issues.

<sup>6</sup> Nash (2011, p. 436) defines 'regenerative practice' as a holistic approach to practice that pays attention to the personal, vocational/professional and structural domains with the intention of facilitating practice which enhances well-being, is life giving, facilitating effectual, fruitful, reflective, wise and ethical practice which benefits clients and the employer, as well as the practitioner'.

- reflect with insight and humility on personal strengths, weaknesses, gifts and vulnerability;
- form and sustain healthy relationships inside and outside the church and with those with whom they differ;
- understand issues regarding human flourishing in relationships and Christian pastoral care;
- respond appropriately to pastoral situations and reflect critically on their own practice;
- understand professional boundaries in ministerial practice and pastoral care;
- release and enable others to fulfil their calling to ministry and mission;
- apply the methodologies of theological reflection and reflective practice habitually and effectively to themselves and their ministry;
- learn from both failure and success”.

And by the end of IME Phase 2, which is undertaken in the Dioceses by Directors of Ordinands and Dioceses’ IME Training Officers, Curates should be increasingly able to:

- “discern God’s mission in a specific context by reflective and empathetic engagement with it in light of its cultural, historical, economic, social, political and religious characteristics;
- help others discern God’s presence and activity in their relationships and in the wider world;
- balance appropriate care of self with the care of others by developing sustainable patterns of life and work, and effective support networks in the context of public ministry;
- approach the sacrificial impact of ordained ministry on the whole of life with wisdom and discernment;
- reflect with insight and humility on personal strengths, weaknesses, failures, gifts and vulnerability in response to a new context of public ministry;
- handle and help resolve conflicts and disagreements, enabling growth through them;
- understand human flourishing in relationships and Christian pastoral care in a range of life circumstances and contexts;
- demonstrate good reflective practice in a wide range of pastoral and professional relationships;
- establish and evaluate appropriate professional boundaries in their ministerial practice and personal lives;

- lead collaboratively and competently, working as a member of a team within a community, as an ordained person;
- show developed skills as theologically reflective and reflexive practitioners in relatively unsupervised settings, exercising wise and discerning judgment;
- inspire and nurture the risk-taking of others;
- enable others to develop the capacity to learn from failure and success;
- be proficient in clearly articulating the faith to those outside the church in a variety of ways and contexts”.

Ladd (2014) argues that this is bringing about a shift of focus in pre- and post-ordination training, from training for a ‘professional style of ministry, to training for a more embodied approach to ministerial leadership in which the minister works hard to attend, and help people to attend, to the subjectivity of the other’ (pp. 358-359). This has implications for ministry in other denominations, including my own Moravian denomination, because training for Protestant ordained ministry in England is largely undertaken in theological federations/partnerships between denominations, in which the CofE is often the major partner.

Whilst reflexivity is seemingly promoted as a modern phenomenon (Thompson and Thompson, 2008; Schön, 1984; 1991), it has long been inherent in a method of theological reflection termed, ‘Theology by the Heart’ (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 18), which ‘looks to the self and the interior life as the primary space in which theological awareness is generated’. This is an ancient form of theological reflection which arguably comes from the Psalm 139: 13-18. This mode of theological reflection has its roots in the writings of Augustine (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2007, p. 51), and was developed further by the Pietist Movement, which strongly influenced my own denomination, the Moravian Church (*Unitas Fratrum*), through the work of Zinzendorf (Freeman, 1998). Indeed, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who is considered to be the ‘Father of Practical Theology’ (Bennett, 2013, p. 34), was brought-up in the Moravian Church (also known as the *Herrnhutter Brethren* or *Brudergemeinde*) (Tice, 2006; Crouter, 2005), and was theologically influenced by ‘Heart Theology’, in developing his theological paradigm, in that he highlights the importance of psychological understanding (i.e. what he called *Divination* – or intuitive perception), alongside the historical study of scriptural text (or *dogmatics*), in the process of hermeneutics, which is ‘deeply self-involving’ and derives from ‘the passionate human engagement with theology’ (Crouter, 2005, p. 124). ‘His overall vision put critically reflexive philosophy as the roots of his diagrammatic methodological tree but required also attention to specific human experiences of God, both within religion and within the wider cultural context’ (Bennett, 2013, p.37). The methods (pedagogy) utilised to develop interior theological reflection have historically been autobiographical

accounts, letters, journaling, verbatim reports and creative writing (Walton, 2014), in which ‘silences are turned into text’ (Bonns-Storm, 1996). However, largely missing from the literature on this form of theological reflection, is the use of Spiritually Reflexive Group work, which this research seeks to address – although the early Moravian Church used a form of SRG called ‘*Banden*’ to foster theological reflection and pastoral care (see Gubi, in press, for a fuller explanation), and Graham, Walton and Ward (2005) hint at SRGs in their concept of Corporate Theological Reflection<sup>7</sup>. Might SRGs, like *Banden*, have relevance for ministerial training, formation and support today?

### 0.3 Practical Theological Reflection

Swinton and Mowat’s (2006, p.95) model of Practical Theological Reflection (with some reservations) forms the structure of this Thesis. It encompasses a four stage approach, which is summarised from Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp. 95-97) as:

Stage 1: *Current Praxis*: This is the stage of identifying a situation that requires critical reflection;

Stage 2: *Cultural/Contextual*: This is the stage of discovering current theory (literature) and practice (research) on the situation;

Stage 3: *Theological*: This is the stage where an implicit and explicit theological lens from established tradition and practice is brought to bear on the situation to tease out areas of resonance and dissonance with established ways of thinking;

Stage 4: *Reformulating Revised Practice*: This is the stage where new forms of practice, or new ways of thinking about current practice, emerge and are promoted in a way that is authentic and faithful.

Each chapter will be incorporated as a part of a stage of this model of practical theological reflection. However, theological reflection will be evident throughout each stage, rather than solely confined to Stage 3 as the model seems to suggest, as to identify a situation that requires critical reflection is in itself an act of theology (Ward, 2012). Likewise, theological reflection will be present in Stage 2, as part of becoming acquainted with current theory and practice involves encompassing the current theory and practice of theology. This is arguably a weakness of this model of theological reflection which seems to suggest that the theological is separate from other forms of reflection, when it is an integral part of the lens that is brought to bear on the process of ‘making sense’. Ladd (2014) is

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<sup>7</sup> Graham, Walton and Ward (2005, pp. 109-137) place the emphasis within Corporate Theological Reflection on developing a *shared* theological narrative, utilising a ‘Community of Faith’ – whereas SRGs enable a theological narrative (or new praxis) to emerge at a more personal level from within the Community of Faith, which may or may not be shared by the others within the community (but which is ‘tested’ for theological authenticity within the community), but which nonetheless holds ‘truth’ and insight for the reflexive individual. Theologically, this reflects the importance of the Body of Christ (or Godhead of the Trinity), whilst at the same time valuing the individuality of the parts that make up the Body (or the Trinity).

critical of pastoral cycle models, and states that they 'leave little space for spiritual discernment, prayer and the presence of God, which makes their use prone to becoming an exercise in practical atheism' (p.361). However, 'spiritual discernment, prayer and the presence of God' play an implicit part in informing the content of the participants' data, have shaped the lens of the researcher, and have informed the content of the literature – so they are very present, if not explicit. Cartledge (2003; 2015) also has criticisms of pastoral cycle models and practical theology, arguing for a deeper engagement with, and appropriation of, Scripture, religious experience, soteriology and a more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between the divine and human agency. However, for the purpose of structuring this research, Swinton and Mowat's (2006) model of Practical Theological Reflection offers useful stages for focusing the content for reflection, with the above proviso.

#### **0.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This introduction has stated the context of this research and made explicit the theological reflection model which structures the Thesis. **Stage One** (*Current Praxis*) will encompass Chapter One, which positions the researcher, and states the situation under investigation, the research question and the research aims. **Stage Two** (*Cultural/Contextual*) consists of Chapters Two, Three, Four, Five and Six. Chapter Two furthers the Literature Review conducted for module TL8003 in this DTh, and reviews further literature on the value and use of Personal Development Groups (PDGs) in Counsellor training, and on their relevance for ministerial training in developing self-awareness and promoting reflexive practice in community, as a form of theological reflexive practice. Chapter Three will outline the research methods and methodological choices which underpin the investigation of the place of reflexivity in ordination training in the CofE's TEIs, and the use of SRGs in the development of reflexivity in CofE ordination training and in support of its clergy. Chapters Four, Five and Six convey the findings of the research. **Stage Three** (*Theological*) consists of Chapter Seven, which offers a critical consideration of the findings and the literature, and makes links with theological reflection. **Stage Four** (*Reformulating Revised Practice*) consists of the concluding chapter which demonstrates the limitations of the research, offers ways of furthering the research, and explores the relevance of the research to the practice of ordination training.



# Stage One: *Experience*

## Chapter 1: Current Praxis

In this chapter, the situation (or ‘current praxis’) that was the catalyst for this research will be elaborated, and the research question and aims will be made explicit. Rooms (2012, p. 82) states that practical theology begins with *praxis*, which is the identification of a situation that then undergoes a process of discernment, leading to *phronesis* – the development of practical wisdom. The aim is to further human wellbeing. *Phronesis* is not an individual act, but is conducted faithfully within community where there is a ‘shared practical sensibility’. ‘We both indwell the community, learning its values and practices but we are also agents of change within it – we assimilate and accommodate within the group’ (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 194, cited in Rooms, 2012, p. 84).

### 1.1 Positioning the researcher

In the context of research, reflexivity is part of the ideographic knowledge that underpins the interpretative phenomenological analytical paradigm (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) – the methodology that primarily informs and enables this research (although this research developed into a mixed methods, or bricolage, approach – see **Chapter Three**). It is therefore important for the reader to gain an awareness of the lens through which this research will be interpreted and analysed, because that lens is inevitably shaped by the experience, values and beliefs (including the theology) of the researcher, in as much as these things cannot be excluded. ‘Hermeneutics is what people are’ (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, p. 107). However, my values and beliefs are sufficiently ‘held’ (or bracketed) as to be open and present to what is encountered, and in honouring the validity of the phenomenology of what the data present.

I am a Professor of Counselling and Spiritual Accompaniment at the University of Chester. I hold an interest in the insights that Counselling and Theology (and the practice of both) have to share and learn from each other, and how these potential tensions are held with grace. I am also a trained and practicing Spiritual Director, and an Ordained Presbyterian in the British Province of the Moravian Church. I have also been (and still am) a Counsellor/Psychotherapist for over thirty years, and a Counsellor Trainer and researcher for the last twenty years. As a Counsellor and Spiritual Director, I have found Personal Development Groups (PDGs) to be facilitative of my spiritual and emotional development, and well-being. However, when I was an ordinand in the Moravian Church, training within the Cambridge Theological Federation (2009-2010), I found no formal small-group

reflexive space provided in my training for ‘processing’ my personal and spiritual development. I was part of a small tutorial group that met once a fortnight with our personal tutor, but that was mostly a social space, and a space in which we reflected on issues within the Christian Church (mostly within the United Reformed Church – the denomination to which Westminster College, where I trained, belonged), rather than explicitly a space for spiritual/theological, emotional and relational formation. This paucity<sup>8</sup> led me to consider whether the provision of a reflexive group might be helpful to other ordinands who wish to develop spiritually/theologically, psychologically and relationally, and led to some initial research (Gubi, 2011) whilst I was at Westminster College. This research, limited though it was by its small scale, by the number of times that the group met, by the qualities of the participants who arguably were not representative of typical ordinands (in that they may have been more psychologically-minded), and the fact that I was both a participant and a researcher in the small group being studied, and therefore the group arguably may have had some allegiance to me, nevertheless concluded that the SRG enabled a transformative experience at both a personal and spiritual level. This is summarised as:

- A space in which to learn to be more real with others and with God;
- A place to challenge and be challenged sensitively before others and God;
- A space where feelings and emotions can be articulated freely, and accepted before others and God (Gubi, 2011, p.64).

Importantly, the ordinand participants concluded its necessity in their training and that of other ordinands. I then wondered what other theological Colleges/Seminaries do to enable reflexivity to develop, and whether any of them use some form of SRG to develop their ordinands spiritually/theologically, psychologically and relationally. More insights on the researcher can be gained from the post-Thesis reflexive statement (see **section 8.6**).

A systematic literature search revealed that there is no pedagogical literature or research on the use of SRGs in the training of ordinands, and there is only a limited amount of literature (largely unpublished) on their use in the support of clergy. Addressing this deficit in the literature is an intention of this doctoral research.

## **1.2 Research question and aims**

The research question that underpins this Thesis is: *Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?* The aims of the research are:

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<sup>8</sup> I am in no way being critical of my training, nor of Westminster College, for which I am extremely appreciative and grateful.

- To explore if, and how, reflexivity is developed in clergy training;
- To explore if, and in what way(s) [if any], SRGs might support and build up the ministry of the Church;
- To examine how SRGs might be understood theologically, psychologically and relationally.

### 1.3 Originality

The use of SRGs in the development of reflexivity within the context of ordinand training in the CofE is not something that has been researched before. So, this research makes an original contribution to knowledge by exploring the use of SRGs within the context of ordination training. There is an absence in the literature (see Gubi, in press, and **Chapter 2**) about the use and validity of SRGs in the training of ordinands<sup>9</sup>. So, this research seeks to address some of that deficiency. Originality is also evident in the way this topic has been researched, in the way that the methodologies have been used, and in the way that the research has been presented. The research is inter-disciplinary, and explores a widely accepted pedagogical method (i.e. the PDG) that is utilised in the training of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, questioning its relevance as a method of pedagogy in the training of ordinands, and examining it through a theological lens to arrive at a theological interpretation – all of which is original. In summary, the object of study is original, the particular application of the methods is original, and the findings are original. These conform to the way that originality in research is accepted at doctoral level (i.e. Level 8) (Phillips & Pugh, 2010, pp.69-70).

### 1.4 Summary

This chapter has made explicit the situation which forms the first stage of Swinton and Mowat's (2006, p. 95) 'Practical Theological Reflection Model', '*Current Praxis*'. It has positioned the researcher, and made clear the research question, aims and originality. Chapter Two begins Stage Two (*Cultural/Contextual*) of the Practical Theological Reflection, by systematically reviewing relevant literature.

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<sup>9</sup> To avoid confusion, there is later reference to the use of Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs) and Balint-type Groups in the CofE in Chapter Two and Chapter Five. However, the main differences between these reflective groups and SRGs, are the structured nature of RPGs and Balint-type Groups, and the absence of overt theological/spiritual reflection – which SRGs explicitly enable, alongside the psychological and relational aspects of reflexivity.

## Stage Two: *Cultural/Contextual*:

### Chapter 2: Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

The initial Literature Review for this DTh was prepared for assignment TL8003. The initial Literature Review cannot be counted towards this Thesis as it has already been awarded credits for module TL8003, but some of its content will feed into the discussion in Chapter Seven. However, the initial Literature Review forms much of an article (Gubi, in press) that has been accepted for publication as part of this doctoral process.

As the research developed, it became clear that what was missing from that initial Literature Review was any literature on the development of reflexivity in theological reflection and ministerial development in ordination training within the CofE, and on the place of group work within that. Also missing from that initial Literature Review was anything on the use of Reflective Practice Groups/ Balint-type Groups within the CofE. In this chapter, I will critically examine this further literature that I have become acquainted with since the submission of TL8003, and which is relevant to the research question: *Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?*

#### 2.2 Method of search

Various electronic academic literature databases were searched (e.g. Ebscohost, Google Scholar etc.) using keywords such as: Personal Development Group, Reflexive Group, reflexive theology, theological reflection, ordination training, Balint groups, Spiritual Formation Groups, Peer Support Groups; but mostly sources came from a snowballing effect which developed with my reading, from general internet searches, and from conversations with others as the research developed.

#### 2.3 The place of reflexivity in theological and ministerial development

As stated in the introduction (**see Section 0.2**), reflexivity has long been part of a method of theological reflection termed, 'Theology by the Heart' (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p.18), which 'looks to the self and the interior life as the primary space in which theological awareness is generated'. In Gubi (in press), I have made the case from my own Moravian tradition that this was developed further by Zinzendorf (Freeman, 1998) who utilised small groups called *Banden* as a

'method of self-scrutiny and pastoral care, leading the religious subject to reveal insights about the self and soul' (Faull, 2011, p.4). I have also argued that this type of reflexive theology can be seen as a form of 'autoethnographic theology' (Walton, 2014), and has parallels with 'Transformation Theology' (Davies, 2013) and 'Ordinary Theology' (Astley, 2013), and with Kelly's (2014) 'Theology of Presence' in which *phronesis* leads to a theology that embraces risk as we face our vulnerable self. The embodied, reflexive self is the primary resource utilised to facilitate the promotion of shared vulnerability, and enables real possibilities for learning and transformation. However, this use of 'self' to develop theological insight has not always been evident in ordination training (Reiss, 2013).

As far back as 1993, Rhymes (1993, pp. 188-193) was arguing for the training of ordinands to embrace the formation of small groups, as a form of pedagogy, in which the deepest expressions of humanity can be made and received, 'to experience at those times a sense of what might be called 'the beyond in our midst', 'a depth of life', 'a sense of God'' (p. 194). Citing Moltmann (1973, p. 86), Rhymes (1993) states that, 'being there for others has as its end to be with others in liberty; being there for others is the way to redemption of life; being there for others is the form which the liberated and redeemed life has taken' (p. 195). Bonhoeffer (1954/2015) also placed great emphasis on Christian community (of which a small group is one form). Bonhoeffer's writing, examined through a 21<sup>st</sup> Century lens and taken out of context, could be described as sexist and 'of its time' (although his ideas were developed in all-male communities so his work reflects a highly gendered context, and his own background was that of a bourgeois Weimar-republic Prussian). However, Bonhoeffer places great emphasis on the importance of each individual in the community (group); on the importance of sharing 'gifts of faith' with others in the community; of discovering about self, others and God; of being with yourself and knowing yourself; and of bearing each other's burdens; and the appropriate place of meekness (e.g. learning sometimes to stay appropriately silent) in community. One way of building Christian community and of learning the art of facilitating such groups in ministry, is to participate in them whilst training for ordination.

In more recent times, Reiss (2013) has charted the different shifts in emphasis within theological training (and selection) in the CofE over the last hundred years. As a result of the recommendations of the 'Formation for Ministry within a Learning Church' (The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, 2003)<sup>10</sup>, there has more recently been a move towards 'Education for Discipleship' which encompasses the notion of 'Lifelong Learning' (Ward, 2005). In developing the concept of 'Lifelong Learning' in ministerial training, Ward (2005) primarily promotes the pedagogy of 'pastoral supervision' as 'the place to play and inter-play' theologically. However, much of what Ward argues as being beneficial from that process of pastoral supervision is also applicable

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<sup>10</sup> This is more commonly known as 'the Hind Report' after Bishop John Hind who chaired the working party.

to the use of SRGs in theological education. Drawing on the work of Taylor (1972), Ward (2005) emphasises the need for a space in which ‘God is there on the inside of human relating, undergirding the ways in which relatedness between self and other is carried forward without collapsing otherness into the self’ (p. 95). This enables difference to be valued and an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to ‘dance around (*perichoresis*)’ (p. 97). Ward elaborates on the importance of developing the capacity to listen, to contract, to maintain and develop appropriate boundaries – all of which can be developed in SRGs. In that safe environment, there is the opportunity to experiment, to ‘play’ theologically, and to practice alternative scenarios with ‘another’. Missing are the insights that might be gained from the group interaction, as pastoral supervision is mostly experienced with only one ‘other’.

Sims (2011) promotes the need for developing a ‘capacity for reflection’ in responding theologically to ‘the complexity of ministry in an increasingly pluralistic world’ (p. 166). Sims draws on the works of Schön (1984), and Wolfe and Kolb (1980), which places great importance on the ‘tacit knowing’ that, in the context of Ministry, contributes to a *repertoire* of pastoral responses that spring from the unconscious, and enables a *knowing-in-action*. This *knowing-in-action*, then leads to a *reflection-in-action*, then a *reflection-on-action* and then to a *reflection-for-action*. This, according to Schön (1984), is the process for the reflective practitioner. Sims (2011) argues that engaging in this process keeps vitality alive in ministry, and prevents past mistakes from occurring (p. 169). Developing these ideas within the context of training ordinands at Uniting Church in Queensland, Australia, Sims (2011) states that he requires ordinands to write critically reflective reports on their ministry experiences, based on the following questions (summarised from Sims, 2011, p. 169):

- ‘What did they do well?’
- What was difficult?
- Were there logistical issues?
- What surprised them?
- How did the family receive their ministry?
- How did they sense that God was active in this situation?
- Would they do anything differently the next time?’

Drawing on Wolfe and Kolb’s (1980) Learning Cycle, *but adding a theological perspective*, Sims (2011) has developed the following further definition to the Four Stages of Adult Learning (see **Figure 1**). Sims (2011, pp. 172-173) states that adding the theological perspective to the Four Stages of Adult Learning enables a theologically reflective ministry, in that:

- in *sensing the presence and action of God*, the clergyperson discerns where God is present and where God is acting. This requires humility and attentiveness;
- in *discerning God's purpose*, the clergyperson is required to stand back from the situation and reflect on what may be God's desires for the person(s) with whom they are ministering, as well as God's hopes for the way that they are ministering;
- in *integrating into one's theology*, questions of consistency with current practice of ministry or faith, are asked. Holding the tensions within personal theology may be required;
- and in *deciding to co-operate with God*, the clergyperson's personal theology may be revised which leads to new implications for pastoral and ministerial practice.

All of these aspects inform the person's current and future practice. Sims (2011) states that if such reflective practice is engaged with, then learning can be deep, and different from much of the 'surface learning' that goes on in ordination training. He concludes that 'quality' ministry is more likely when theologically reflective practice is engaged in using his proposed theological lens of '*sensing the presence and action of God, discerning God's purpose, integrating into one's theology, and deciding to co-operate with God*' (p.175).

Learning Strategy	Learning Environment	Primary Mode	Theological Perspective
Concrete Experience	Emphasising Personal Experiences	Feeling or Getting Involved	Sensing the Presence and Action of God
Reflective Observation	Understanding Concepts	Watching	Discerning God's Purpose
Abstract Conceptualisation	Preferred Logical Thinking	Creating Ideas	Integrating Into One's Theology
Active Experimentation	Applying Knowledge and Skills	Making Decisions and Doing	Deciding to Co-Operate with God

**Figure 1. Further Definition to the Four Stages of Adult Learning (Sims, 2011, p. 171)**

Sims' (2011) notion of theological reflective practice has much to commend it, but to make it '*spiritually reflexive practice*', I would suggest the addition of another column focussed on *reflexivity*: 'What am I noticing about myself in relation to other, and how might I 'be' different?' (see **Figure 2**). This further level of awareness required of reflexivity, enables a deepening of the awareness of the part (and the past) that the person brings to the encounter, or to the experience, that they are faced with. This, in addition to the other areas of attention identified by Sims (2011), arguably provides a more reflexive response, which I would argue enhances self-awareness and deepens insight,

enabling a better pastoral and theological response, in keeping with the development of reflexive theology and reflexive practice.

Learning Strategy	Learning Environment	Primary Mode	Reflexive Perspective	Theological Perspective
Concrete Experience	Emphasising Personal Experiences	Feeling or Getting Involved	Growing awareness of how I am feeling	Sensing the Presence and Action of God
Reflective Observation	Understanding Concepts	Watching	Awareness of what this is tapping into for me	Discerning God's Purpose
Abstract Conceptualisation	Preferred Logical Thinking	Creating Ideas	Making sense of how I am feeling and responding	Integrating Into One's Theology
Active Experimentation	Applying Knowledge and Skills	Making Decisions and Doing	Trying out a different way of being	Deciding to Co-Operate with God
<b>Figure 2. Adding reflexivity to the Further Definition to the Four Stages of Adult Learning</b>				

Kelly (2013), researching in the context of Scottish Healthcare Chaplaincy, argues for a movement away from *habitus* (i.e. the acquisition of knowledge) to *phronesis* (i.e. practical wisdom which involves developing sound judgment and wisdom formed from reflection on previous experience to inform practice in the present). Kelly (2013) argues for *group* theological reflective practice, in which someone presents a *verbatim* (i.e. an experience that they have encountered). The facilitator encourages the other group participants to respond to what has been presented in a way that is non-judgmental and tentative, using three types of response that reflect types of Greek words used in the discovery of the empty tomb in John 20: 1-9 – notice (*blepo*), wonder [or theorise (*theo*)], and realise (*horao*). In preparation, the presenter of the *verbatim* engages with the following questions (summarised from Kelly, 2013, p.249):

- ‘What was this experience about – for other(s) and for me?’
- Whose need was being met – and how?
- What were its implications for other(s) and for me?
- What does it tell me about my pastoral ability?
- What questions does it raise about God, my values, beliefs, worldview/ frame of reference?’



Kelly (2013) argues that these questions are designed to promote *phronesis* in the participant's practice. During the session, the *verbatim* presenter shares his responses to the questions, and the other group participants are invited to respond in a manner that promotes reflection. 'Reflective practice is ended by each participant stating how what they have realised from the shared learning will inform their future practice' (Kelly, 2013, p. 250). In evaluating groups that practiced this form of theological reflection every four to six weeks for over a year (n=70 Chaplains), Kelly (2013, pp. 250-252) found that 95% felt that the experience had impacted positively on their spiritual care practice (identified as: it encouraged a habit of continual reflection on practice, it encouraged a habit of continual reflection on developing self-awareness, it alerted participants to their own developing spiritual needs, it enhanced their spiritual lives, it enabled them to filter content of what to share with patients); 85% felt that the experience of reflecting theologically together had positive effects on their relationships within their teams; 83% felt that the groups enhanced their resilience and vocational fulfilment (identified as a renewed sense of meaning and purpose in their spiritual care practice, and as a means of staying well in a demanding and draining role). These are impressive results, although it is unclear how much involvement Kelly himself has as researcher/ facilitator/ promoter, and therefore how much the results might be skewed through allegiance to him. However, Kelly concludes his research article by translating what has been developed as group theological reflective practice, into what he terms 'Values Based Reflective Practice', in an attempt to promote its use as embedded practice within a secular healthcare service. In so doing, Kelly arguably gives more attention to the reflexive elements of the focus by examining 'values', in that he promotes the questions (summarised from Kelly, 2013, pp. 254-255):

- Whose need(s) were met during the encounter?
- What does this experience tell me about my caring ability?
- What does it tell me about me?
- What questions does it raise about my values (that inform my attitudes and behaviours)? i.e. With whom did the power lie? Whose voice(s) dominated or have most value: Whose voice(s) were not heard or undervalued?
- What future action will you take in relation to this encounter? i.e. For the wellbeing of the patient/career/member of staff or others involved? For your own future practice? For your own wellbeing?

These important questions are arguably less promoted in his group theological reflective practice, but belong there, along with the theological, in developing greater reflexivity among participants.

Ladd (2014), writing as a person who is responsible for Ministry and Formation at a CofE TEI, argues for a more 'embodied approach' to ministerial development, in which the minister is enabled 'to work hard to attend, and help people to attend, to the subjectivity of the other' (p. 359). This can lead to the valuing of the contribution of each person in the life of the Church, which Ladd (2014) argues reflects Paul's desire for a Christian Community (1 Corinthians 11:17- 14:40) that *honours minority voices* and promotes the discipline of *community discernment*. In arguing for this, Ladd unwittingly seems to express the experience of what can occur in SRGs:

'There is a mystery to the other that is not to be violated or controlled, but protected on a journey in which identity and mutual knowing is formed through relationship. This journey of inter-subjectivity involves an attentive effort that [can be] described as the movement from 'sensation' to 'perception'. 'Sensation' sees the other as an object. 'Perception' is a deliberate choice to listen and not just to look. It is a journey in which we refuse to allow the relationship to be reduced to a single subjectivity, refuse to appropriate the other, but allow her to be 'other' in embodied relationship. Furthermore, this journey of openness to the subjectivity of the other is one in which we must be prepared to guard that subjectivity in ourselves and in the other. The goal is not fusion, but rather a relationship between two subjects, the intention of which is to leave to the other his or her subjectivity. [This allows room for] a silence [or 'third space'] in which there is room for genuine attention to difference, to the history of each, not least to the party whose history has most consistently been unheard... This practice involves the developing of boundaried listening; the creating of a third space in community – a truly hospitable space – where people learn to attend to each other's personhood. This challenges the temptation to fusion, the melting away of human boundaries in a quest for 'the answer' or 'our way of doing things' that preoccupies the life of so many communities, consciously or subconsciously' (Ladd, 2014, p. 359).

Ladd argues that theological reflection needs to be learned in context and in relationship (community), *as spiritual discernment*. Ladd then argues for a greater emphasis in theological education on learning in placement, supervised by 'educational practitioners' who are engaged in self-aware theological reflection on ministry. However, Ladd's arguments are a strong justification for the development of SRGs in TEIs, as a way of

'building reflective 'hubs' of (6-8) students... that enable theological reflection in context to be the heart of ministerial training with genuine attention to what it takes to form community that attends to people's subjectivity, and which is at home in building

relationship with the stranger... and encourages reflective learning and development as a norm for ministers and congregations alike' (p. 363).

Research by Harkness (2012) strongly argues for methods in theological education that enable 'deep' versus 'surface' learning<sup>11</sup> in order to develop critical thinking and enhance meta-learning. This enables students to move from their theological education into life-long ministry, with its accompanying personal and professional development (pp. 153-154). Wong (2009) conducted an evaluation of the best methods for developing reflective practice in theological students and concluded that it was incumbent on theological educators to find 'creative ways to evaluate reflection that best centres on student learning and engagement' (pp. 185-186). It is the contention of this Thesis that spiritually reflexive groups are such creative relational spaces in which 'deep' learning can be gained.

So, recently there seems to be thought and attempt at integrating autoethnographic methods (Walton, 2014) of reflective theological practice in ministerial training, although it still appears to be struggling for acceptance and validity in TEIs (see data in **Section 4.1**).

#### **2.4 The use of clergy peer-support groups in supporting clergy resilience**

It is clear from the literature search that reflexive support groups have been part of the *support culture* of some professions, e.g. doctors (Siegel and Donnelly, 1978), and counsellors (Luke and Kiweewa, 2010; Rowell and Benschhoff, 2008; Donati and Watts, 2005; Payne, 1999; 2001; Hall et al., 1999). Indeed, Hall et al. (1999) demonstrate from their research, in the context of counsellor training, that what is learned in those groups is reinforced and beneficial over time, with more positive reports of professional relevance, educational value and application of learned skills and attitudes. In particular, skills in relation to challenging, handling silence, and giving and receiving feedback are highlighted as being of particular benefit (p.111). This is important and relevant to thinking about the use of SRGs in theological education, as Garner (2013) gives particular attention to the difficulties that clergy face in receiving criticism, and concludes that there is limited opportunity in their ministerial training to address these difficulties. It is also important in the context of supporting and promoting self-care for clergy, given Charlton et al's (2009) and Chandler's (2009) findings about the state of psychological health among clergy. Albeit contextualised in the United Reformed Church, Charlton et al. (2009) listened to the voices of fifty-eight clergy, who were

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<sup>11</sup> Harkness (2012, p. 143) states that 'deep learning' involves the critical analysis of new ideas, linking them to already known concepts and principles, and leads to understanding and long-term retention of concepts so that they can be used for problem-solving in unfamiliar contexts. In contrast, 'surface learning' is the tacit acceptance of information and memorisation of isolated and unlinked facts.

a group that were highly dedicated people, yet who were suffering from high levels of poor psychological health (e.g. clergy stress, professional burnout), and still deriving high levels of satisfaction from their ministry. There is a strong argument that the benefits which Hall et al. (1999) identified, could also be gained in a clergy training context, by the inclusion of SRGs. Chandler's (2009) research, likewise, highlights the debilitating effects of pastoral burnout among clergy (n=270) and argues for the promotion of leader self-care practices that foster resilience, vitality and well-being. There is a wealth of research that highlights clergy stress – too much to cover in this Thesis (e.g. Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011; Francis et al., 2005; Francis et al., 2004; Francis et al., 2000).

It is evident from the literature (e.g. Francis, Robbins and Wulff, 2013), that, in the USA, *minister peer-groups* have formed part of the coping strategies for reducing professional burnout among clergy, alongside prayer – with 53% of the clergy who were randomly surveyed (n=744) belonging to a minister peer-support group. The study does, however, conclude that out of the coping strategies of 'taking a sabbatical', 'taking study leave', 'having a mentor', 'using a spiritual director' and 'being a member of a minister peer-support group', none of these significantly lowered levels of emotional exhaustion, and that out of these five coping strategies, only 'taking study leave' and 'having a mentor' were indicative of higher levels of satisfaction in ministry. Chandler's (2009) research also identifies ministerial support groups as a valuable form of support. Chandler further identifies 'spiritual dryness'<sup>12</sup> as a primary predictor of emotional exhaustion. Because of this, Chandler emphasises that 'rather than any specific spiritual, rest-taking or support system practice... pastors, by virtue of their calling, need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God, to maintain life balance, reduce stress and avoid burnout' (p. 284). Chandler concludes her research by arguing that '[how] seminaries... can assist their candidates to develop healthy personal practices is a crucial curricular consideration' (p. 285). Jackson-Jordan (2013), in her systematic literature review, states that peer and mentor relationships are important in preventing clergy burnout, alongside fostering ways of enabling 'the individual's sense of connectedness with the Transcendent' (p. 3) to prevent spiritual dryness. She concludes that, 'Faith group leaders should develop and fund models of support for clergy that utilize small peer groups and mentors/facilitators... Faith groups will benefit from the results of such research for designing seminary curriculum and to create leadership development models that can sustain healthy and successful clergy leaders' (p. 4).

Braudaway-Bauman's (2012) article provides anecdotal evidence of the value of clergy support groups, arguing strongly for external facilitation by a trained group facilitator, and an open agenda. She states that more than 15,000 clergy have been engaged in peer-groups over the past

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<sup>12</sup> Chandler (2009, p. 283) identifies 'spiritual dryness' as a depletion of spiritual vitality but this does not necessarily indicate a lack of spirituality.

nine years, but does not offer any evaluation of the groups. Braudaway-Bauman nevertheless argues for a '*community of practice*' for intentional reflection on the participants' ministries.

'Pastors are helping one another stay connected to the joy of ministry. As they gather together, prayer fills the air, laughter shakes the room, competition flies away, confidence takes deeper root. Conflicts are addressed before they escalate or become entrenched... Clergy lean on one another and learn together... Calmer and more generous pastoral spirits are growing in the rich soil of real community. Once pastors experience the transforming power of this community, they can no longer imagine doing ministry without it. For many years clergy have told stories about isolation and loneliness of ministry. But a new story is beginning to be told about how clergy find affirmation and support, guidance and accountability, as they meet in peer groups' (p. 25).

Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2013), however, state that there is little research conducted to determine the effectiveness, on mental health, of peer support groups among clergy. Using mixed methods research [eight focus groups (n=59) and a survey developed from the data from the focus groups (n=1726)], Miles and Proeschold-Bell's findings that are directly relevant to this research are that whilst peer-support groups for clergy are helpful for many clergy, they do not suit all clergy and cannot be relied on as a 'blanket solution to the challenges inherent in pastoral work' (p. 221). Attention needs to be given to the internal dynamics operating in groups, and make sure that participants are involved in groups that match their individual characteristics. However, Bonhoeffer<sup>13</sup> (1954/2015) argued that difference need not destroy community (groups); that one should endure being in community with those who disagree with you (as Christ did); that there are times when things have to be faced alone (even in a community); and times when one has to learn that greater wisdom lies in saying nothing.

## **2.5 The use of reflexive-type groups in the CofE**

As conversations developed in this research process, and as data emerged from participants, it became evident that some dioceses within the CofE have facilitated Consultation and Support Groups for Clergy, or Work-Based Learning Groups, as part of continuing ministerial development and support. Documentation relating to these is unfortunately unpublished and so the picture presented here may not be complete, but it nevertheless gives a picture of work previously done in

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<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer's theology of enduring suffering emerged from the context of opposing Hitler and developing an alternative to theological liberalism which he believed failed to stand-up against Nazism, for which he was martyred (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 118).

this area within the CofE to support clergy. From paperwork made available to me from the Diocese of Southwark (which is difficult to reference because of its unpublished nature), it seems that in the late 1960s/ early 1970s, Revd Derek Blows set up '*Basic Groups*' which met for ninety minutes for three terms of eight to ten weeks. These groups were facilitated by two psychotherapists. Group members paid a contribution, but the facilitators were paid an honorarium by the Diocese. In 1997, Heather Charlton conducted some collaborative research into what she called '*Consultation and Support Groups*' (Charlton, 1997). The rich data (as yet unanalysed) in her research paper indicates the profound value of these groups to their participants. By 1998, these *Basic Groups* had changed their name to '*Consultation and Support Groups*', were led by pairs of facilitators who were in regular supervision themselves, and the number of groups had grown to ten, consisting of eight members each, and were set up in different parts of the diocese. The purpose of the groups was defined as 'to help their members become more effective in their pastoral work and to receive from the group, consultation and support in relation to pastoral situations in which they find themselves ministering' (Walrond-Skinner, date unknown). An advertisement for these groups can be found in **Appendix 8**. By 2004, a case was being made for the funding of the Consultation and Support Groups (Bryant, 2004); their purpose had changed slightly to 'provide support and learning resources for clergy and lay persons with pastoral roles and tasks and to help members in becoming more effective in their relationships with those they are pastoring', and there were thirty-six members spread over six groups (Bryant, 2004).

It seems that in 1999, the Diocese of Chelmsford was also running similar groups for clergy which they called 'Clergy Support Groups' (Bagnall, 2000). The rich data from participants, which is appended to Bagnall's paper, indicates the groups to be highly valued by participants. In an unpublished Briefing Paper to the Diocese of Salisbury Ministry Development Team (2005), Work-Based Learning Groups were promoted as a way of addressing the isolation and stress that clergy were feeling, offering them the capacity to feel supported outside of Church authority structures. This Briefing Paper was based on a similar scheme that was run in the Diocese of Chelmsford (2000), which promoted groups as (paraphrasing from the document): a place of supervision and support that can help to stop the cycle of feeling constantly drained, which leads to a drop in work standards promoting guilt and inadequacy, leading to a further drop in standards; a place for gaining a sense of well-being within the institutional relationships, within the parish community, within family and self, will undoubtedly produce a healthier person and priest; gaining self-awareness is necessary in balancing a role that is called upon to model both authority and vulnerability. Groups give opportunity for openness and honesty before others and members are required to work towards finding a way to both hold vulnerability and affirm the confidence and authority of the other. It is a

chance to tell their story – a personal story, a different story, and a valid story. It is an opportunity to give and receive support and encouragement in the situation in which each incumbent finds him/herself, and that can be taken back into the life and ministry of each member.

The Briefing Paper to the Diocese of Salisbury Ministry Development Team (2005) argues for three groups of five clergy to run for two years, meeting once a month for two and a half hours with a supervisor/facilitator. As a pilot scheme, it was suggested that an evaluation take place at the end of one year and at the end of two years. This was achieved and the experience evaluated after nine months and two years. The anecdotal results demonstrate the value of the groups as being: gaining different perspective and context; enabling the value of in-depth listening and containing the desire to ‘fix’ and ‘make better’; gaining a shared experience; developing self-awareness; gaining insight into triggers and helping to think of different ways of responding; a place to vent frustrations; developing ways of handling conflict and defusing situations; developing confidence in resisting others’ projections (p. 10). As part of this doctoral process, the data from this pilot scheme was made available to me, and an analysis was conducted and published (Gubi and Korris, 2015). Although limited in its scope, the data nevertheless demonstrates the value of Reflective Practice Groups<sup>14</sup> to be: enabling of change, a place of support, a place to search, a place to be quiet, as countering isolation, as learning how to handle conflict, as a place to learn how to establish boundaries for self-care, as health giving, as empowerment and as a place where one can learn to listen more carefully. The limitations of the groups were identified by participants as: participants sometimes giving answers and sometimes not listening (Gubi and Korris, 2015, pp. 22-23).

In the Briefing Paper to the Diocese of Salisbury Ministry Development Team (2005), there is an acknowledgement that clergy are poor at self-awareness, at offering compassion to themselves, at differentiating between roles, at asking for support, at maintaining appropriate boundaries, at self-care, and that fragmentation and isolation are endemic among clergy. This is echoed in Hudson’s (2015) article and the literature in **Section 2.4** above. Whilst the main emphasis of these groups is on promoting and supporting clergy well-being, this type of group does not appear to promote theological reflection, but is motivated more by a need to foster self-care, self-awareness and support. Currently in the Diocese of Salisbury, they are run as part of their clergy wellbeing programme (Continuing Ministerial Development Brochure, 2015). The groups are described as offering: ‘Encouragement, challenge, insight, wisdom, boundaries and education’, and the benefits are described as: ‘Confidence, change, self-awareness, discernment, containment and group work

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<sup>14</sup> The title of the ‘Work-Based Learning Groups’ was changed to ‘Reflective Practice Groups’ as a clergy person’s working life is holistic, and includes the family and the home. So, ‘Work-Based Learning’ did not fully describe the intent of the work. It was thought that ‘Reflective Practice Groups’ seem to better describe the intent of the groups.

skills', with the purpose of the groups defined as, 'nurturing the wellbeing of clergy by reducing isolation and sharing skills and knowledge' (Diocese of Salisbury, 2015, p. 3). The aim of the group is 'growth in self-awareness and integration through the exploration of their ministry' (p. 4). It is recommended that these groups utilise an external facilitator from outside of the ordained ministry but who have a good understanding of clergy life and are actively involved in their own spiritual journey; and that they run once a month, for 2.5 hours per month, over a two year duration.

Following the Salisbury model of Reflective Practice Groups, St Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy have offered funding, since 2013, for CofE dioceses to set up groups as part of their commitment to building clergy resilience. This initiative was developed in response to research commissioned by St. Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy, conducted by Christian Research (2013), which highlighted the need for support to be offered to clergy. In exercising a choice of methods of support that clergy stated that would be prepared to access: 49.4% (n=243) of clergy surveyed (n=492) stated that they would access a 'safe environment to offload and discuss issues (sometimes called reflective practice)'; 37.8% (n=186) stated that they would access 'spiritual direction or something similar'; 47% (n=231) stated that they would attend 'training on how to manage causes of stress, e.g. managing expectations, dealing with difficult people etc.'; and 22.6% (n=111) stated that they wouldn't access any support offered. Again, this is motivated by needing to provide support for, and to maintain, clergy wellbeing (Gubi and Korris, 2015).

Within the published research, Reflexive-type Groups have also been utilised in the Bristol Diocese of the CofE, via Balint-Style groups to support clergy (Travis, 2008). Traditionally, Balint Groups were developed in medical contexts, and 'work with eight to twelve General Practitioners, processing cases of difficult patients, and using psycho-dynamic insights to explore the patient's presentation and the physician's reaction' (Zeckhausen, 1997, p. 61). They are an ongoing resource for participants, and are not time-limited, consisting largely of ninety minute, weekly meetings that are facilitated by a competent facilitator who is educated in group processes. The format has been adopted for use in supporting clergy, and Becher (1983), in the context of supporting clergy, describes the process as, 'Groups of eight to ten pastors meet under the guidance of a psychoanalyst in order to incorporate psychoanalytic perception into their pastoral work. In studying the unconscious meaning that various situations had for the member of their parishes, the clergymen themselves undergo processes of psychological transformation leading to changes in their professional practice' (p.124). In the UK, Travis (2008) evaluated the experience of a Balint-Style Group which was started in 2004 in the Bristol Diocese of the CofE. Although she was both facilitator and researcher (which may have inherent conflicts of interest), Travis nevertheless concludes that:



'...it was a democratically run group where members could bring heartfelt dilemmas and tricky pastoral relationships to responsive colleagues and psychoanalytically trained leaders. It provided, therefore, both a learning environment where new psychological skills could be picked up, and also modelled a particular way of attending to people's unique situational needs. This model could be taken out from the group and used in ministry, particularly in ministry to those unfamiliar with the traditional church and its culture' (p. 128-129).

Although the model is fundamentally a psychological one that is run with the primary aim of supporting the psychological wellbeing of clergy, Travis (2008) states that the rest of the group agreed with one member when he said he felt that despite the psychological emphasis, "God was in all of it" (pp. 128-129). So whilst not being a theologically reflexive group, it is clear that theological reflexivity can take place. Nease (2007), however, expresses some concerns about Balint Groups, and within the context of supporting General Practitioners, argues for less orthodox forms of Balint-type groups that need to continue to focus on (1) patient-doctor relations, to better understand and be of service to patients and doctors' well-being, and (2) hold an 'informed' focus on the safety of the group's experience, as excessive cross-examination from group members can be undermining of the experience (pp. 510-511).

At approximately the same time as, but independent of, the Salisbury and Bristol groups, Barrett (2010) set up Reflective Practice Groups (RPG) in the Exeter Diocese in response to the isolation that she encountered in a significant number of clergy clients who had accessed counselling with her, but who didn't want to let go of the counselling relationship when the work was completed. Barrett compared her approach to group facilitation with that of Travis (2008) and found it to be less structured and more 'messy'<sup>15</sup>, but from an evaluation of the experience, her research found the value of the RPGs to be that of:

- "Shared understanding and experience - *'other people who know what it's like'*.
- Sharing common problems.
- Relieving loneliness and isolation of ministry.
- Valuing the perspective/experience of others.
- A safe space to express/vent feelings - anger and not having to protect anyone.
- Putting things in perspective - alleviating feelings of stress and guilt: *'not just me'*.
- Continuity - the ongoing nature of the groups.

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<sup>15</sup> By 'messy' Barrett means less psychodynamically 'rigid' (i.e. less focussed solely on unconscious process) and more free flowing and holistic in the exploration of process.

- Trying things out when not sure.
- Humour - as '*a way of letting off steam*' and relieving tension".

With the effect on ministry identified by the participants as:

- "Living the Practice – a way of, being, thinking, relating, speaking
- Strengthening and building relationships – relieving isolation
- Practising skills – listening, reflection,
- Thinking about process – people's experience and relationships
- Responding differently – stepping back and not re-acting
- Courage & confidence to tackle problems
- Delegating more
- More open with colleagues
- Saying 'No'
- Permission to take time out
- Practising reflection with staff team/ curates
- Developing different forms of reflecting – journaling – with others
- A step on from counselling – feeling and staying better" (Barrett, 2010, pp. 102-104).

Barrett's research was conducted with four groups of thirteen RPG participants, using a collaborative enquiry method. The research is arguably limited by the unknown, unconscious influences of the 'insider researcher, and the small group sizes (3-4 per group). Nonetheless, Barrett's (2010) research offers a useful perspective on the value of RPGs to individuals, and on the influence of RPGs on ministry, from the perspectives of RPG participants. In the Diocese of Birmingham, Pryce (2014) set up and researched the value of RPGs, as a practical method for theological reflection, using poetry to enable theological reflection. Pryce's research demonstrates another dimension in the use of RPGs in the context of continuing ministerial education.

## **2.6 Other types of small reflexive groups in use within the CofE**

Spiritual Formation Groups are yet another form of small-group to emerge from research conversations, which promote spiritual formation and reflexivity (Smith with Graybell, 1999). Dougherty (1995) describes group spiritual direction (a form of Spiritual Formation Group) at 'at its most basic format [it] involves silence, sharing, silence, and response'. She notes that these small groups go beyond providing a warm sense of fellowship or therapy group, as 'the strength of spiritual community lies in the love of people who refrain from getting caught in the trap of trying to

fix everything for us', (p. 14) simply providing each member of the group with a safe place to find and know God. There are three basic commitments members must make: 1) seeking an honest relationship with God, 2) wholehearted participation in the group by deep listening and response, and 3) sharing their own spiritual journeys for the consideration of the group members. Small group spiritual direction consists of a basic format and protocol, although there can be slight variations (Dougherty, 1995). Typically, the 2-hour session convenes as a large group and then breaks into smaller groups of three or four individuals. The initial large group discussion is a reminder of protocol and confidentiality. Each breakout group begins with silence to promote centring and grounding. One individual then briefly shares while the group listens silently. The sharing is followed by another brief period of silence to contemplate and reflect on what has been shared. Then, members of the group may briefly respond with their own "noticings" or open-ended questions. The responses by group members are not intended to be problem-solving with suggestions, nor are their responses characterized as "cross-talk," in which they share their own similar experiences. Instead, the sharing is designed to help the individual by reflecting back what has been stated. This exchange is once again followed by silence and is then repeated until all members within the group have had a chance to share. Edwards (1980; 2001) describes five primary functions of small group spiritual formation. The first is to provide sanctuary, a safe and comfortable environment; second, to introduce new concepts through effective teaching; third, to provide time for reflection to absorb and interpret what has been said and experienced; and fourth, to promote a sense of accountability for the self and the self-in-the-group. Lastly, the facilitator must work to manage and maintain an effective schedule of time to promote meaningful engagement for each participant. Welsh (2013) researched the effectiveness of using Spiritual Formation Groups with Protestant men and concluded that the use of such groups is effective for nurturing spirituality among them (p. 98). However, quoting Matthew 7: 15 (Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves), Matthew 24: 5 (For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many) and Matthew 24: 24 (For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect), Oakland (2007) regards Spiritual Formation Groups, with their emphasis on mysticism rather than Biblical truth, along with all aspects of the New Reformation Movement (e.g. Emerging Church and postmodernism, led by McLaren (2001)), as the undoing of faith which leads to spiritual deception and which has eschatological overtones. These arguments of Oakland (2007) are rather 'loaded' categories which are very binary. They emerge from a particular theological context and may not hold any credence in practice, as the Bible arguably contains much mysticism.

Cell Groups, likewise, were mentioned by some of the participants, and are seemingly promoted by some CofE dioceses. The Society of Mary and Martha (Lee & Horsman, 2002) encourages Cell Groups as a place 'to promote a culture of clergy regularly and supportively asking questions of each other such as the crucial, 'how are you with God?' and feel that they should remain an important part of clergy support throughout ministry. Whilst there doesn't seem to be any research on the effectiveness of Cell Groups in clergy training nor in continuing ministerial development, Cell Groups are being explored as a future shape of the CofE.

'I have absolutely no doubt that the Church of England will be looking far less homogeneous in a couple of decades; different kinds of congregations, with different rhythms of life. I believe very strongly that whether we're talking about inherited models of church or fresh expressions, the real heart for the next generation is pretty well bound to be in those small groups of people working at their relationships, at their understanding, together, quietly, in the long term - the Cell, in other words. Whether inherited, or not so inherited, we're looking at that development of mutual formation, mutual shaping of life and possibilities that will take place within the sort of group where people really trust one another. Building personal, face to face, relationships is one of the things that will make the relationship between inherited patterns of church and new models viable. Without building trust in friendship across those frontiers, not a lot will really stick. And I think if we're talking about cultivating the cell and the small group, we also need to cultivate, very deliberately, trustful friendships with those who are not in the same style or the same pace; informal mentoring relationships, exchanges of experience' (Williams, 2011)

Involvement in such groups during ordination training enhances the ability of clergy to sustain such groups within their own ministries, as well as benefitting from them personally.

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the literature on the development of reflexivity in theological reflection and ministerial development in ordination training within the CofE, and made suggestions on the place of SRGs within that. It has also reviewed the literature on the use of Reflective Practice Groups, Balint-type Groups, Spiritual Formation Groups and Cell Groups within the CofE. In Chapter 3, the methodological choices and research methods that take this research further will be explained.

## Stage Two: *Cultural/Contextual*:

### Chapter 3:       **Methods and methodological choices**

In this Chapter, the research methods and methodological choices used in the three phases of the research will be explained. The research question that underpins this Thesis is: *Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?*

#### **3.1 Ethical practice**

Ethical approval was sought and gained through the University of Winchester's ethical approval process. Lone working procedures were followed in respect of conducting interviews. All data have been anonymised to protect the identity of the contributors, and have been coded. Data attributed to Theological Education Institutions are coded with 'TEI' and a number (e.g. TEI2). Data attributed to Bishops' Advisors are coded with 'BA' and a number (e.g. BA3). Statistical data from the survey of Reflective Groups' participants are attributed to each of the three dioceses by the code D1 (Diocese one), D2 (Diocese two) and D3 (Diocese 3), and the non-statistical data are attributed to each participant within each diocese by a code (P). Therefore, the data attributed to participant two from diocese one are D1P2, etc.

All data were stored in accordance with university regulations and the Data Protection Act (2000), and have been kept securely in locked premises or on encrypted computers and/or pen drives. Every effort has been taken to avoid harm to participants, to seek their informed consent through the various phases of the research and to protect their right to withdraw without prejudice (see **Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7**). Had emotional issues arisen, I (as a qualified Counsellor) would have either been able to facilitate that process of offering support whilst not losing sight of my role as 'the researcher', or I would have been able to supply a list of therapists in the participant's locality. However, such issues did not arise. The research has been conducted according to the principles for best practice, stipulated by the 'Ethical Framework for Researching Counselling and Psychotherapy' (Bond, 2004). Further Ethical Approval was sought, and granted, when the online surveys were used instead of the focus groups in Phase Three of the research.

## **3.2 Purposive sampling**

### **3.2.1 Phase 1: Contextualising the research**

The first aim of the research was to explore if, and how, reflexivity is developed in ordinand training (see **Section 1.4**). Because this research is contextualised within the CofE's (2014, pp. 10-15) recent 'Formation Criteria for Ordained Ministry' (see **Section 1.1**), it made sense to frame the research within the CofE's twenty-four recognised Theological Education Institutions (TEI) as identified on the CofE's website: (<https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-education-and-development/initial-ministerial-education/recognised-training-institutions.aspx>) [accessed 27/05/2015].

To determine how reflexivity is promoted and encompassed in the curriculum of ordination training, and what methods of pedagogy are utilised to attain that, all twenty-four TEI principals were emailed 'Participant Information Sheet – Principals' (see **Appendix 1**), asking them to answer two questions by return of email:

- What parts of the curriculum that your Theological Education Institution teaches are specifically designed for the development of reflexivity in your students who are training for ordination?
- What pedagogical methods are used to assist in the development of reflexivity among your students who are training for ordination?

The initial response rate to the email was inadequate to give a sufficient sense of how reflexivity was developed in ordination training (probably due to the busyness of the time of year in which the initial contact was made, and possibly due to the use of email to gain the data, which can easily be deleted or ignored). So, a follow-up email was sent a month later to those who had not responded, which resulted in a better response rate of 25% (n=6). Because this was still insufficient to gain a full-enough picture, a letter was then posted out to the TEI Principals who had still not yet responded. This resulted in a final response rate of 46% (n=11). This was enough to gain a credible understanding of how reflexivity is encouraged in ordination training, and what pedagogical methods are used. The data gathered are presented in **Section 4.1** as a narrative.

### **3.2.2 Phase 2: Seeking the views of those who facilitate, or have facilitated, SR-type groups**

The second and third aims of the research (see **Section 1.2**) were to explore if, and in what way(s) [if any], SRGs might enhance the ministry of the Church; and to examine how they might be understood theologically, psychologically and relationally. Unsure of what SRGs were facilitated in TEIs (if any), but aware that some SR-type groups were run in some CofE Dioceses by Bishops' Advisors for Pastoral Care and Counselling, I decided to email all of the forty-two Bishops' Advisors

identified on the Anglican Association of Advisors in Pastoral Care and Counselling (AAPCC) website: <http://pastoralcare.org.uk/contact/local-advisors-phone/> [accessed 27/05/2015], to ascertain how many ran SR-type groups, or knew of such groups in their Dioceses, and to ask if I might interview them if they did. The email invitation read as:

'I am emailing you to ascertain if you facilitate/run, or have facilitated/run, Spiritually Reflexive Groups for the ordinands or newly ordained clergy in your diocese. Please can you reply by return of email to simply say if you do, or have done, or not. If you do, then I will invite you to participate in this research in which you will be interviewed to gain an understanding of what you do and why. You can turn down the invitation if invited. I am interested in exploring your views on, and experience of, such groups, if you have been part of, or facilitate, or have facilitated, such a group (or something like it that you may know by a different name).' [email content to AAPCC contacts dated 05/05/2015].

Of the forty-two Bishops' Advisors (BA) who were contacted, eight (19%) responded to indicate that they facilitate (or have facilitated) SR-type groups in their Dioceses. These were identified as 'Reflective Practice Groups', 'Balint-type Groups' or 'Support Groups' for clergy; two BAs who did not currently facilitate such groups indicated that they were willing to be interviewed about their experience of being a part of a SRG-type group within a CofE setting. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were set up with the above respondents. These were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed, and based on the following questions:

- Can you tell me something about the Spiritually Reflexive Group(s) that you facilitate, or that run in your Diocese?
- What benefits do you think it/they serve(s) [reflexively, relationally, self-care, pastoral care, preaching, theological exploration, any other]?
- Are any such groups run for ordinands as part of their training for Ministry in your Diocese?
- How might such groups be understood theologically?
- What are the hindrance factors of/in such groups?
- Are they a good thing for ordinands and newly ordained clergy? Why/why not?
- Is there anything else you may want to add?

The interviewees were based in CofE Dioceses that were geographically widespread, indicating that SR-type groups are not a feature of a particular geographical area or TEI culture. After the interviews were transcribed, the relevant transcript was sent to each BA to check for accuracy. They were

invited to add to, or amend, the data if deemed necessary. The interview data were then analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 1999; 2009) (see **Section 3.3**). During the course of the interviews, two other dioceses were identified as currently running reflexive groups. An invitation to each of them was emailed to take part in the research. Neither responded. However, this does indicate that these groups are more widespread than this research was able to capture due to the lack of response. A google search of RPGs for Clergy in the CofE confirms this, as do my conversations with Jan Korris, Consultant for RPGs at St Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy, London.

### **3.2.3 Phase 3: Seeking the experiences of SR-type group participants**

To add another important dimension to achieving research aims two and three, it seemed beneficial to include data from those who have experienced being part of a SR-type group as a participant. Once the data from Phase One were analysed, five *potential* SRGs were identified as being part of ordination training in the CofE TEIs (see **Section 4.1.3**). Consideration was given to setting up and interviewing focus groups in the five TEIs, consisting of participants who had attended, or were attending, some, or all, of the five *potential* SRGs. However, on closer examination of the data, it was evident that the groups identified in the data did not sufficiently fulfil the definition of an SRG<sup>16</sup> as they were either too structured, contained a formal educative agenda, met too infrequently or didn't seem to give participants much time to explore anything at depth (or a mixture of these reasons). Setting up focus groups in TEIs would also have involved seeking permissions from TEI principals, facilitators and group members. Because of the problematic nature of these matters, this idea was abandoned.

Consideration was then given to interviewing some of the groups, as focus groups, that were identified and facilitated by the BAs in Phase Two of the research (see **Chapter Five**). After discussion, and for mainly practical reasons (e.g. time, cost, geography), it was decided to seek participants' data in two ways: one was through the use of an online survey in order to cast a wider net, and the other was through the use of interviewing focus groups in at least one diocese. One diocese (Diocese 1) was identified as being particularly strong in the provision of SR-type groups, and so discussions were conducted with their BA, diocesan office and Archdeacon (the sponsoring authority), to seek permission to send out an online survey to participants. Separate discussions were had with another BA in a different diocese (Diocese 2) to seek permission to interview the two groups that she personally facilitated. An approach to conduct an online survey was made to Diocese 3, who readily gave permission.

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<sup>16</sup> See **Section 0.1** for the definition of a SRG.



In seeking permission to set up the online survey in Diocese 1, and send it out by email to participants through the diocesan office that organised the SRG-type groups, it was felt initially by the diocesan office that to even send out the survey link by email from them to the participants (who already knew the identity of the participants), might be considered by some of the participants to be a breach of their confidentiality. However, after discussion and the use of email 'blind-copying' to ensure anonymity, Diocese 1 agreed to send out the online survey from their office on the condition that they could have the aggregated data as a way of evaluating the provision of the RPGs that they were offering. This request was agreed to, although the data may have been affected by the fact that the diocese would see the aggregated data. However, the fact that it was aggregated and anonymised hopefully has enabled the data to be an honest reflection of the participants' experiences. The online survey was made up of questions from the data on the benefits and limitations that were voiced in the data from the BAs. Room was also provided for additional qualitative data to be provided, and for theological reflections on their experience. The research instrument 'Bristol Online Survey' (BOS) was used (see **Appendix 5** for the questions asked). The data were analysed statistically and electronically by BOS, and are presented in **Chapter 6**, thus making this research a mixed methods approach (or Bricolage). Within this Diocese 1, the online survey was sent to 29 participants. Participants had two weeks to respond to the survey which took no more than ten minutes to complete. A reminder email was sent out two days before the closure of the survey, which improved the initial response rate. 16 participants responded, making the final response rate 55.2%.

Setting up the focus groups in Diocese 2 proved to be challenging, but for different reasons than those in Diocese 1. Permissions were needed and sought from the BA (who happened to be the facilitator of both groups that were run in the diocese), and from each group member - many of whom were keen to be involved in the research but who were reluctant to give the time to be interviewed. This took several months to organise but with little progress in meeting as two focus groups. Participants were sent the Participant Information Sheet in **Appendix 6** and the Consent Form in **Appendix 7**, but because the meeting of the focus groups became so problematic, a decision was eventually made to abandon the idea of hosting focus groups, and instead to resort (with the permission of the BA) to using the same online survey that had been sent to Diocese 1. Within Diocese 2, the online survey was sent to 8 participants. Participants had two weeks to respond to the survey which took no more than ten minutes to complete. 7 participants responded, making the response rate 87.5%. Approaching Diocese 3 was more straight-forward. The same online survey that was sent to Diocese 1 and 2, was sent to 27 participants in Diocese 3. Participants again had two weeks to respond to the survey. 14 participants responded, making the response rate 51.8%. So,

over three dioceses, the online survey was sent to 64 participants, with a collective response rate of 57.8%.

### **3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

As a researcher, I am pragmatic rather than purely philosophical, as can be seen in the adaptation to circumstances using a mixed methods approach. I, along with Bryman (1996) question whether the philosophical traditions that underlie a particular method need be determinative for its usage. That makes me more interested in seeking a research methodology that enables the task that I need achieving, to be achieved. As such, I am task-focussed rather than being interested in understanding the nuances and philosophical underpinnings of the instruments being used. However, that is not to negate their value, nor my knowledge of them. My soul is qualitative, in that I am not interested in reducing human-experiences to statistics (although I recognise the value of that in surveying large samples, as can be seen in Phase Three of this research). So my choice of IPA (Smith et al., 1999; 2009) is as a methodology that honours the lived experiences of the participants who have been interviewed, but which recognises that I, as researcher, bring a degree of interpretation to the data being analysed. I have stated elsewhere (e.g. Gubi, 2015b, pp. 3-5), that the aim of IPA is to explore, in detail, participants' views of the topic that is under investigation. It is a phenomenological approach, in that it is concerned with personal perception rather than with the formation of objective statements. It is a method that seeks an insider's perspective, but which takes account of the fact that the researcher's own perceptions are needed to make sense of the other's world through a process of interpretative activity. Therefore, it is the researcher's role to comment on, and make sense of, the participant's activity and opinion. IPA is a bricolage of established approach and methodology, in that it brings together a phenomenological approach and a symbolic interactionism approach, whilst using research instruments and methods of analysis that are commonly found in discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The philosophical paradigm on which IPA is based, is that it is not necessary to go beyond the verbal statement to understand underlying cognitions or to predict the relational dimension between verbal statement and behaviour. Instead, IPA attempts to value the perception and meaning that are attributed to an object, event, or experience, whilst recognising that meaning can only be obtained through a process of interpretative activity. It is a dynamic process that is complicated by the researcher's own conceptions. The method of analysis is creative, not prescriptive. It relies on a method of making sense of the data through the coding of superordinate themes and subordinate themes, and the seeking of connections. It is important that the researcher's bias does not distort the selective process of the categorisation of themes. Initial themes can be governed by the prompts that are used at the interviewing stage. However, at the

transcribing stage, it is important for the richness of the data to determine the emerging themes and categorisation, and for the researcher to be led by that process rather than to dictate it. Once a list of superordinate themes has emerged, the researcher is then required to be selective towards the emerging subthemes (or subordinate themes), with the selectivity dependant on the parameters of the research and the relevance of emerging subordinate themes to the research topic. At the writing-up stage of the research, the shared themes, patterns, connections and tensions are translated and woven into a narrative account that details the interesting and essential things about the participants' responses, and the researcher's interpretative analysis of them. These data are presented as a narrative comprised of the respondents' comments that are interpretatively analysed. However, at this stage of weaving the tapestry that is the narrative, it is important for the unique nature of each participant's experience to emerge; and throughout, the participants' voices are heard in the rich data. These data are presented in **Section 5.2**. In IPA, it is acceptable to engage a small, homogenous, purposive sample (Smith et al., 2009), as this enables a more idiographic approach which can better honour the rich data and lived experiences of the participants. In practical terms, data generation (i.e. conducting, transcribing and analysing interviews) is time-consuming and the rich data are often 'wordy'. So, a small sample can produce rich data that are able to be detailed, nuanced and idiographic, and which can be accommodated given the time and word-limit constraints of this Thesis.

### **3.4 Integrating the phenomenological and the theological**

Within a Social Science context in which I am used to researching, the phenomenological is readily embraced. Truth is revealed, and meaning is made and valued at an existential level. However, Practical Theology has to hold the tension of engaging in a conversation between what may be considered eternal truths (i.e. theology), and what phenomenology holds as important personal truths. Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp. 80-94) offer a way of enabling this tension to be held, by seeing research in Practical Theology as a mutually critical conversation between theology and social science. This enables indissoluble differentiation:

'At the same time as their difference should be acknowledged, so should their unity. The social sciences can offer complementary knowledge which will enhance and sharpen our theological understandings. Similarly, theology will offer perspectives which will challenge and shape perspectives offered by the social sciences. One does not discount the other; in a similar way to the way that divinity and humanity were held together in the person of Christ, so also theology and the social sciences hold together in critical

complementary tension within the lived-experience of the researcher or the practitioner' (Swinton and Mowat, 2006, pp.85-86)<sup>17</sup>.

In enabling this to happen, Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp.91-94) suggest that *hospitality* (i.e. being hospitable to other forms of knowledge and alternative approaches to the world), *conversion* (i.e. that one is deeply challenged/converted by the experience in the service of God, and with God's grace) and *critical faithfulness* (i.e. that the divine givenness of Scripture and the genuine working of the Holy Spirit are present in the interpretation of the research) are needed. My intention, in this Thesis, is to bring integrity, hospitality, conversion and critical faithfulness to my interpretation of the data. To these, I will add *humility*, because as in IPA, it is not the intention of the research to formulate universal truths that can be widely applied as 'the truth'. Rather this research honours the lived experiences of the participants and points to wider possibilities; and it is hopefully the start of further research (see **Chapter Eight** for the limitations of this research and to how this research could be furthered). Cartledge (2003) argues that if we consider the whole of creation to be God-given, and able to be known in a variety of ways, knowledge need not be polarised in an 'either/or' fashion – although Ward (2012, p. 27) states that not all created things participate in God in the same way. However:

'...practical theologians in their use of social science methods and techniques will bring a distinctively theological epistemology that is influenced by a Christian worldview and spirituality... They are, in effect, two sides of the same coin, or twin moments in time. This means that they can be usefully employed together in order to understand the theological praxis...' (Cartledge, 2003, p. 82).

### **3.5 Validity and trustworthiness**

Yardley (2008) states four criteria that enable validity and trustworthiness in qualitative research. These are '*sensitivity to context*', '*commitment and rigour*', '*coherence and transparency*' and '*impact and importance*'. In addressing each of these criteria: '*sensitivity to context*' is evidenced by paying careful attention to ethical issues, through the use of semi-structured interviewing and open questions, by paying attention to participants' perspectives, by formulating a research question that has been addressed, by clarifying what is already known through reference to theoretical and empirical literature, and in gaining an awareness of socio-cultural contexts. '*Commitment and rigour*' is evidenced through purposive sampling, through depth and breadth of analysis, through methodological competence, through in-depth engagement and delivering additional insight.

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<sup>17</sup> Ward's (2012) work on Ecclesiology and Ethnography being one such example.

'Coherence and transparency' is evidenced through an 'appropriate fit' between theory and methodology, through the use of transparent methods and data presentation, through researcher reflexivity (although this is limited by the size of the Thesis as priority is given to the subject being researched), through the explicit positioning of the researcher and through the coherence of the study; and 'impact and importance' has been evidenced by noting the impact of different perspectives on professional practice, through identifying theoretical importance and by suggesting further research and implications for professional practice. All of these criteria are met in this Thesis.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has captured the methodological choices and research methods that were utilised in the data capture. Chapter Four, Five and Six will make explicit the findings from the analysis of the data gained from the three phases of the research.

## Stage Two: *Cultural/Contextual*:

### Chapter 4: Findings: Phase One.

This chapter (also see **Appendix 9**) contains the data from the TEIs that demonstrate how reflexivity is developed in the curriculum of ordination training, and the place of group work within that.

#### 4.1 Phase 1: Reflexivity in the curriculum

From the twenty-four Principals of the Church of England’s recognised TEIs listed on the Church of England website (<https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/ministry/ministerial-education-and-development/initial-ministerial-education/recognised-training-institutions.aspx>) [accessed 27/05/2015], there was an eventual response rate of 46% (n=11). This response rate provides a credible overview of the pedagogical methods that are utilised in TEIs to enable the development of reflexivity among ordinands. The data from the TEIs (see **Appendix 9**) enable a contextualisation of the study in that they provide an overview of the place of reflexivity in the training of ordinands, and of the use of small reflexive groups within that process. A graphic portrayal of the data is presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Pedagogical methods used for developing reflexivity in the CofE’s TEIs**

TEI	Curricular Activities	Theological Reflection	Spiritual Direction	Ministerial Supervision	Residential Sessions	Reflective-Practice Type Groups	Retreats	Placement	Journal	Self-Assessment
1	Y	Y	Y	Y				Y		
2	Y			Y	Y			Y		
3	Y					Y				
4	Y	Y			Y				Y	
5	Y	Y		Y		Y			Y	Y
6	Y				Y	Y	Y			Y
7	Y									
8	Y	Y			Y			Y		
9	Y	Y				Y				
10	Y	Y		Y		Y				
11	Y	Y							Y	

Because of the limitations of wordage in the Thesis, the narrative provided by the TEI Principals on how reflexivity is included in the curriculum is included in **Appendix 9**. The remainder of this chapter

will focus solely on the use of small groups within that curriculum, and particularly on how (or if) those small groups comply with the definition of SRGs, which is ‘a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level’ (Gubi, 2011, p. 50).

## **4.2 Use of groups in the development of reflexivity**

### **4.2.1 Action Reflection Groups**

As shown in **Table 1**, five of the TEIs stated that they utilised small groups in the development of reflexivity. TEI3 utilises ‘*Small Action-Reflection Groups*’ throughout their provision, in which all students are grouped into small action-reflection groups (usually between five and eight), with an experienced ordained minister as facilitator. The groups are mixed across year groups, largely for pragmatic reasons to do with cohort size and geography – so a normal group would have a mix of first-year, second-year and third-year ordinands. The course is based around six modules, related directly to the formation criteria for ordained ministry training: Mission, Evangelism and Ministry; Ministry in the Institutional Church; Spirituality and Ministry; Ministry and Vocation; Relationships in Ministry: Personality and Character; and Relationships in Ministry: Leadership and Collaboration. For each module, each member of the group presents a case study drawn from their ministerial experience in their training parish or context. The group then engages in structured theological reflection using an action-reflection model. This would normally take up to two hours. In the past the discussions were facilitated by the experienced ministers who convene the groups, but recently they have expected ordinands to take turns in chairing the discussion, as they want them to be able to use the method with other people as well as using it to inform their own ministerial practice. Following the discussion, the students conduct further reflection, research and study and then write up the process in a 5000-word portfolio. This contributes towards an academic award, but also (more importantly) forms part of the evidence base for end of curacy assessment at the end of their third year. Anecdotally, students report that the groups are highly effective in helping to develop reflective practice, and to form habits of lifelong learning. They also perform an important pastoral function in creating supportive peer-networks which the students greatly value. It is the hope of TEI3 that, as more students move on into posts within the diocese, they will want to continue to meet, or develop use of the techniques with their own congregations. The portfolio work is invaluable in informing end of curacy assessment, as well as giving the diocese regular feedback on where students ‘are’ in terms of their formation.

These *Action Reflection Groups*, whilst supportive and enabling habits of lifelong learning to be gained, appear rather structured and agenda-led.

#### 4.2.2 *Open Space Groups*

TEI5 identified '*Open Space Groups*'. Guidance on the '*Open Space Groups*', provided by TEI5 states that they consist of three, forty-five minute slots which are built into a module to enable students to reflect on their own discipleship during the module. On identified dates, groups of four people meet for a set period of forty-five minutes after the lecture. Groups are arranged beforehand. One member of the group acts as the facilitator/time keeper - also arranged beforehand. These group times are integral to the module. They state that real learning is not just about grasping concepts or accumulating information. It is about personal and shared formation. Open space times enable personal reflection to happen in a supportive listening context. It helps people to reflect aloud on what they are learning, how they are processing it. They state that it is not counselling, ministry, advice giving, praying or general discussion. The facilitator keeps the time and hosts the group. Each person in turn is given a timed space in which to share something they are thinking through or learning. The rest of the group listens without interrupting. They make a gift of their full attentive and supportive listening. The total time allocation for each person is ten minutes. It is suggested that each person shares for the first six minutes maximum. The facilitator will give a time warning after five minutes that their sharing needs to be coming to a close. For the four minutes that remain, the rest of the group may then respond, briefly. This can include questions of clarification. Comments may affirm or reflect back what they are hearing. No other stories are offered by group members or advice given. The focus is wholly on the person sharing. The person who has just shared is then asked if they wish to say anything in closing. They are then thanked, and the focus of the group's attention moves to the next person. Finally, the facilitator may share. A second person takes over that role to make that possible. No one is obliged to share. If they wish, when it comes to their turn, they simply say that they have nothing that they wish to say. However, they are *strongly encouraged* to participate. TEI5 did say that this can feel a slightly strange and heavily structured way of meeting, but they ask participants to suspend judgment and just go with it. They state that what is shared will not be 'sorted', 'solved', or answered in this time. They ask participants to let go of measuring the group on those terms, because that is not how formation happens. It is part of a wider learning journey. They ask the participants to trust the process. Boundaries are insisted on, in that they ask participants to respect the other members of the group by being punctual, and what a person shares must stay within the group and remain utterly confidential unless permission has been personally sought to share it.

Again, whilst being of value, these *Open Space Groups*, whilst fostering listening skills and developing the ability to share and receive, appear to be so highly structured as to leave very little time for depth of facilitation of students' process.



### **4.2.3 Discipleship Groups**

TEI6 stated that '*Discipleship Groups*' are an important part of the life of College. Discipleship Groups are small groups of around a dozen students which provide space for students to grow together as disciples and leaders. They meet at various points in the week and offer space for prayer, companionship and support, socializing, and service. They are one of the key 'spaces' for formation during training. Students in the second of three years meet in a closed group to reflect together on the process so far. This is not given an academic mark; rather it is designed as safe space to enable students to reflect creatively and critically on what they have learned about themselves in the formational process to date.

'The guidance given is: 'These reflection points are not marked. Present in a way you think is engaging – and share what you have been learning during the last two years. Some things (among many) to consider: things which have surprised you; how your reading has informed your praying and vice versa; things you have enjoyed and why?; things you have struggled with? How have you handled this?; formative experiences on placement; is there a popular song, story, piece of art, which captures your experiences?; if you had to sum up what God has been doing with you on this journey – what words would you use and why?' (TEI6).

The group is facilitated by a tutor, and each student has around forty-five minutes to present. All students are put into Discipleship Groups when they start training. These groups are led by student leaders. The formational purpose of Discipleship Groups is that they offer a context in which to learn to work well with other leaders, and for development and enrichment - spiritually, personally and ministerially.

Although being of undoubted value, *Discipleship Groups*, whilst small and offering opportunity for safe reflection, seem to blur the boundary between socialising, prayer, companionship and service, and can be in danger of becoming a more social and collusive space.

### **4.2.4 Formation Groups**

TEI9 uses what it calls '*Formation Groups*'. These gather a group of around 8-10 ordinands, who meet with a tutor two or three times a term, to bring together theology and practice. Most of their ordinands are 'mixed mode', in that they train full-time, but learning half of their time on placement in a parish, and half of their time in academic study. Formation Groups are considered to be a key place, by TEI9, where they learn to relate theology and practice.

The description of *Formation Groups* is limited, but their infrequency of meeting seems to preclude the depth of relationship being formed that is needed for trust to build that enables honest, in-depth reflection.

#### **4.2.5 Reflective Practice Groups**

TEI10 uses '*Reflective Practice Groups*' in which the students take responsibility for the reflective process, and for attending to one another which helps in the development of each other's reflexivity. For the placement, they ran a reflective practice group structure for an hour on one morning per week throughout the placement, which amounted to approximately 20 hours; each student would be placed in a group of between five and seven students with one faculty tutor, or a skilled practitioner, and at their appropriate academic level. It was based around the pastoral cycle, and students were introduced gradually to the practices appropriate to each phase of the cycle. At the beginning of the placement, they completed a two hour session on journaling and reflexivity, and a two hour session on observation and description with them all together, introducing some of the skills appropriate to this phase – demographic work, community audit, listening and observation – with people, things, places, processes. During this part of the placement, they were encouraged not to be 'doing' things in church – but observing. In their groups, during this period, each student would have the opportunity to bring five minutes on their first impressions – in which details about service times, personnel, congregation size etc. were disallowed. They would reflect together on this whilst developing some deep listening and starting to become aware of their own reflexivity.

At the next phase, the students undertake a two hour session all together on analysis and some of the skills and practices relevant to this. During the placement groups, they each have the opportunity to present for ten minutes on a description of their context – with pictures etc. – and the beginnings of analytical work articulating some of their questions and key observations. At the end of the summer term, the students would experience a two hour session about integrating theological, biblical and interdisciplinary study with their practice in an iterative way, and also undertake some work with them on personal reflection and reflexivity. This session would also include some guidance about the shape of the placement report and in particular the fact that they wanted proposed outcomes for the church and development outcomes for them. During the autumn term, each student has the opportunity to present fifteen minutes on the chosen focus for their reflection and some of the interdisciplinary, biblical and theological resources that are informing their reflection; students contribute their own reflection, questions and resource ideas to each other. There would usually be one more small-group session to pick up any final questions and to return to the issue of personal reflection and reflexivity. Tutors facilitate the group and ensure as

full participation as possible. Tutors are free to make their contributions, but they try to avoid spoon feeding; there are lectures on leadership, mission strategy and community formation that run alongside the placement and placement groups. There were also other modules that fed into the placement experience – faith formation and discipleship – including writing a short course (an education and learning module) and preaching – including two assessed sermons. The placement finishes in early December.

TEI10 finds that this approach generates a good level of reflective work and enables students to become able theological practitioners for whom theory and practice reflection work together to bring about creative and imaginative theologically grounded practice. However, TEI10 states that one of the weaknesses with reflective practice is that it is based on a philosophy of individual self-construction and the reflection happens outside the context before returning to it.

Again, whilst being of undoubted value, these *Reflective Practice Groups*, although small in size, seem structured, with the inclusion of lectures at times.

#### **4.3 Summary**

The analysis of the data from the TEIs (also see **Appendix 9**) has contextualised the place of reflexivity in the training of ordinands, as viewed by the TEI Principals. It is evident from the data that reflexivity has a place in the curriculum, and small groups form part of the pedagogy utilised for developing reflexivity within training for ordination. However, these do not sufficiently fulfil the definition of an SRG as they are either too structured, contain a formal educative agenda, meet too infrequently or don't seem to give participants much time to explore anything at depth (this will be discussed later in **Chapter 7**). In Chapter 5, the analysis of the data from the Bishops' Advisors will be presented.

## **Stage Two: *Cultural/Contextual*:**

### **Chapter 5: Findings: Phase Two.**

This Chapter contains the data from the interviews with the eight Bishops' Advisors (BA).

#### **5.1 Phase 2: Reflexive Groups run for Clergy**

Of the forty-two Bishops' Advisors (BA) who were contacted by email, 19% (n=8) responded to indicate that they facilitate (or have facilitated) SRG-type groups in their Dioceses. The data from the eight Bishops' Advisors were analysed using IPA and are presented using five superordinate themes: *Contextual Issues*; *Formats*; *Benefits*; *Hindrances*; and *Theological Understanding*, and accompanying subordinate themes (See **Table 2**). Because of the nature of dialogue, there are inevitable overlaps between some of the superordinate themes and subordinate themes, but every effort has been taken to try and avoid repetition and to make links between subordinate themes where possible.

#### **5.2 Superordinate and subordinate themes**

##### **5.2.1 Superordinate Theme 1: Contextual issues**

###### **5.2.1.1 Subordinate theme 1.1: Support**

Three of the BAs (e.g. BA2, BA5 & BA8) explicitly stated that their rationale for running clergy groups was that of offering support. However, the supportive nature of the groups was implicit in what all of the BAs shared. BA5 said:

“I felt that I wanted to try and offer something that wasn't just crisis management when clergy got into difficulty, and that we might look at doing something that enabled some sort of form of ministerial and personal development, and try and combine those two things” (BA5).

**Table 2. Superordinate themes and subordinate themes from the data provided by the Bishops' Advisors.**

<b>Super-ordinate Themes</b>	<b>5.2.1 Contextual issues</b>	<b>5.2.2 Formats</b>	<b>5.2.3 Benefits</b>	<b>5.2.4 Hindrances</b>	<b>5.2.5 Theological understanding</b>
<b>Subordinate themes</b>	<b>5.2.1.1 Support</b>	<b>5.2.2.1 Balint-type Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.1 Facilitating thinking and gaining insight</b>	<b>5.2.4.1 Time</b>	<b>5.2.5.1 Relational nature of God</b>
	<b>5.2.1.2 Promotion</b>	<b>5.2.2.2 Accompanied Ministerial Development Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.2 Respecting difference</b>	<b>5.2.4.2 Scary</b>	<b>5.2.5.2 Reflects journey of the disciples</b>
	<b>5.2.1.3 Facilitation</b>	<b>5.2.2.3 Work-Based Learning Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.3 Self-care</b>	<b>5.2.4.3 Needs are too big</b>	<b>5.2.5.3 Running the race</b>
	<b>5.2.1.4 Voluntary commitment</b>	<b>5.2.2.4 Self-Appraisal Peer Review Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.4 Pastoral encounter</b>	<b>5.2.4.4 Boundaries</b>	<b>5.2.5.4 Love thy neighbour as thyself</b>
	<b>5.2.1.5 Place in ordination training</b>	<b>5.2.2.5 Cell Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.5 Challenge theology</b>	<b>5.2.4.5 Prayer</b>	<b>5.2.5.5 Vulnerability</b>
	<b>5.2.1.6 Payment</b>	<b>5.2.2.6 Peer Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.6 Church life</b>	<b>5.2.4.6 Lacking commitment</b>	<b>5.2.5.6 Body of Christ</b>
	<b>5.2.1.7 Personality type</b>	<b>5.2.2.7 Previous ordination training</b>	<b>5.2.3.7 Personal and theological development</b>	<b>5.2.4.7 Being sent</b>	<b>5.2.5.7 Incarnation</b>
	<b>5.2.1.8 Feeling safe</b>	<b>5.2.2.8 Reflective Practice Groups</b>	<b>5.2.3.8 Different from other groups</b>	<b>5.2.4.8 Poor facilitation</b>	<b>5.2.5.8 Trinitarian</b>
	<b>5.2.1.9 Purposeful</b>		<b>5.2.3.9 Countering isolation</b>	<b>5.2.4.9 Not for everyone</b>	<b>5.2.5.9 Becoming</b>
			<b>5.2.3.10 Experiencing vulnerability</b>	<b>5.2.4.10 Struggles with expectation</b>	<b>5.2.5.10 Eucharistic living</b>
<b>5.2.3.11 Person to person</b>			<b>5.2.4.11 Distance</b>		
		<b>5.2.3.12 Negotiating boundaries</b>			

BA5's comment is the only explicit reference to the use of these groups for ministerial development. The personal development/ supportive aspects are the areas that are given more emphasis by most of the BAs. BA7 stated that Reflective Groups can be a place for deeper conversations and support:

"...People in their late 50's, been clergymen for many years, and they wanted to be an Archdeacon or Bishop – it didn't happen, but they've done things in the diocese. Directors of Finance or something like that and eventually they come off the Board and then nobody is interested in them and now they find themselves, and if they are brave enough to share it, they kind of say "I've lost my faith. I don't know where I'm going. There's no redundancy. I'm trapped and if I go, they might make my job a house for duty. What does that say about my image?" I've had one or two of those, and where else can they have the confidence to say such things? Where we can mirror back and think well, there are other jobs. There is a life out there" (BA7).

#### **5.2.1.2 Subordinate theme 1.2: Promotion**

Careful attention was given by some as to how the group was 'promoted' to the diocese. Some felt that it was important that it wasn't seen as a theological group for fear of it becoming too intellectualised, rather than focussed on personal process:

"How do you offer the space and call it purposeful without restricting it to particular areas of exploration...? I think the fact that the frame is very, very secure; people know what's going to happen each time. When they come each time, we will say, 'who would like to take the first time today', and the time boundaries and obviously the commitment to confidentiality. That then offers the possibility for quite a lot to happen within that setting. But I would never market it as a group for theological reflection because I think that would make its purpose 'out there' as it were, feel different from what it is - but absolutely, I think that theological reflection can happen. I just wouldn't want people to think it's a full on academic theological group, because it isn't" (BA5).

BA5 emphasises the importance of the group as being on reflexivity, focusing mainly on the psychological, but fears *explicitly* extending its remit to the theological in case it becomes too intellectualised, rather than process focused. However, none of the BAs excluded the exploration of personal theology where it related to, or offered insight into, personal process and struggle.

#### **5.2.1.3 Subordinate theme 1.3: Facilitation**

Some types of group seemed to require two facilitators. BA5's justification for this was:

“I think that you model something relationally by having two facilitators in front of the group. I mean you could say you model that with your interactions with the group if you are on your own, but I think that we relate to one another in front of the group - we occasionally disagree with each other in front of the group about what we think might be going on, but they see something going on which is hopefully a reasonably healthy sort of interaction. I also think that there is an aspect of – again we are not trying to do this overtly in any kind of hierarchical or patronising way - but there is a sense of sort of co-parenting, and there are often people in the group with quite deep levels of deprivation in terms of what they have experienced from their own parents. I think that there is a sense in which two people holding the group feels really quite containing” (BA5).

When challenged on whether there might be a resourcing issue with having two facilitators, BA5 responded:

“That’s a valid argument, and I think that it’s not impossible to do that, and to run the group on that basis [with one facilitator]. I just think perhaps it adds a layer of richness to have two. If we had a deluge of clergy saying they wanted to be in groups, I would consider that. I do think facilitation is very important because there’s something about the group feeling very much held in mind - the sort of parent holding the child in mind, and I think that’s a kind of – a sort of Winnicottian thing really - providing a holding environment, and I think that is an unspoken, but very valued, part of the setting, and the frame” (BA5).

BA4, on the other hand, facilitated the groups on her own.

“I suppose I see my role as managing the boundaries, bringing the group together; a sort of administrative role which is organising it, setting it up, that sort of thing. Then helping the group to first of all establish what will be the contract, what will be the boundaries and then helping the group stick to that. So it’s very simply managing the time, but also then to reflect on group process, if that’s something that needs to be done so the group doesn’t just become a bit of a talking shop, really. It is a space where people will reflect and get feedback from each other, and then periodically to remind the group why we’re here, and is it actually serving its purpose and do we want something more or something less? And so managing the space really, but not in a very – I mean I’m part of

the group as well to a degree, but I suppose I'm more on the edge. It's very much their space and I am the caretaker of the space really" (BA4).

When asked about whether there was greater benefit in having one facilitator or two, BA4 replied:

"All I can say, when I initially met with both groups that I work with, what we talked about is what they wanted from the group; and what they want is a very loose structure, insofar as the most structure that I offer is right at the beginning – just go round the group for everybody to check out when we have a bit of a chat to start with, and then does anybody want any time? And if they do, I'll make sure that happens. They liked that very fluid, sort of structure, so that, somebody may come and actually not really have anything in particular to bring, but they want to be part of this and contribute. They like the way it sort of flows" (BA4).

BA4 described her style of facilitation as being 'Person-Centred', and thus was less structured than other group forms:

"I think it's about trusting the process, trusting the group process, trusting where people are. People bring what they need to bring" (BA4).

Clearly there are resourcing issues with funding two facilitators. Several of the facilitators do the work as part their BA role, but when there are two facilitators, at least one is paid (but possibly not the going rate [see **section 5.2.1.6**]). Dual facilitation offers a dimension to the work that single facilitation doesn't offer. However, BA4 felt that from her experience, single facilitation worked well. The important thing here is that the group is facilitated by a qualified and experienced person, who can keep the focus on process.

#### **5.2.1.4 Subordinate theme 1.4: Voluntary commitment**

The fact that attendance at these groups was mostly voluntary, was considered important.

"I think that you might then get quite a lot of anti-task behaviour really [if it were made compulsory]. Even people who volunteer and feel committed to the group, still find it notoriously difficult. I just wonder really whether you would get a lot of acting out if you... Sabotaging..." (BA5).

It seemed that it was difficult enough for clergy to commit:



“People in the group say, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t come next time, I’ve just got to do this’, whatever, and you know, in my book I might be feeling privately ‘What? You prioritise that over the group?’ I think it’s not easy for clergy and actually just instilling that culture of making this a priority and sticking to it, has been hard enough with people who have said, ‘Yes, I’m interested and I want to come” (BA5).

BA4 felt that the nature of the group would change if people were ‘sent’:

“I made it very clear that the group would exist for itself and for its own needs and not for any – not part of any other programme or initiative. There are other spaces for that. It would be the agenda that the group wants to make so that’s quite important to retain the autonomy of the group as something very different from all the other groups that are out there already” (BA4).

BA3 mentioned the importance for one group of discovering that she herself was facilitating the group on a voluntary basis, and that that realisation shifted something within the commitment of the group:

“What really changed things was when one of them said crossly, “Well, it’s all right for you, you get paid to do all this”, and I said, “Well, no I don’t. I do this voluntarily”. At which point, the atmosphere totally changed and they were much more co-operative. So, I wish that had been made clear earlier really, then there wouldn’t have been quite so much defensiveness around - and hostility - and I think it did help in a way” (BA3).

It seems important that the participants who attend these groups, do so on a voluntary basis, so as not to sabotage the process of the group by ‘having to attend’. This may have implications for facilitating such groups in TEIs as a mandatory part of a course.

#### **5.2.1.5 Subordinate theme 1.5: Place in ordination training**

Some BAs considered reflexive groups in ordination training to be a potential contributory factor in creating a different culture of self-reflection that could continue after training. BA5 stated that:

“Some sort of Balint group might be useful, but I think the feeling is that curates have so much initial ministerial development to do, and to try to do a group as well would be too much. I just feel it would really set something, set a mark really early on in their ministry... create a culture of self-reflection, and I think actually curates and ordinands are really ripe for this sort of thing” (BA5).

BA4, also, felt that reflexive groups should be part of ordination training:

“I actually feel very strongly it should be part of training... I think it’s about developing self-awareness early on. I do see a number of clergy who are not very self-aware, given their roles. It feels incumbent on them to be as self-aware as possible, working with people. I think if it became part of the culture at training level, that this is something which is considered not just desirable, but essential, they may be given self-sufficiency to build it in their ministry earlier on, or more people might be more self-aware... I feel very passionately about self-awareness in ministry, that I’ve been quite surprised that it’s not included in training, or hasn’t been” (BA4).

BA4 felt that ordination training could learn from Counsellor training

“It becomes part of one’s training and one’s culture of the counselling world is that we have time for supervision, time to be in groups and that the business of self-awareness and developing self-awareness is built in early on so that you stick it out. Clergy don’t have supervision, so there isn’t the space to reflect confidentially. I think the groups serve that sort of role too. Knowing thyself, it’s part of that. You’ve got to know yourself if you are going to be effective in helping others, so it’s going to be very hard for people to give themselves permission to do something which might feel like an indulgence and this has not been built into the initial training. What happens is that early on into curacy, I meet them and have a workshop with them about self-care and it’s a wider thing, but part of that, we talk about the benefit of groups and offer it then as an opportunity, so at that level of training. So throughout three years of curacy they will have that in year one of curacy but that’s the first time that it’s really, as far as my understanding goes, that it’s mentioned, you know pre-curacy, it’s not part of the training course” (BA4).

BA3 also felt that reflexive groups, run in a way that is similar to Personal Development Groups, in ordination training would be valuable:

“Yes, I do because I think in ordination training, people are coming with a much more fluid attitude to their ministry, to theology, to all of the different changes that are going on in their lives as a result of doing the training and also it seems to me that they are vital because I can only talk about the Anglican Church, the Methodists are better, but the – you are working all the time with people and the dynamics of working with people is very, very complex” (BA3).

However, BA3 recognised that the nature of all ordination training didn't necessarily lend itself to the inclusion of reflexive groups for practical reasons:

"Ordination training is not always your full-time residential stuff. It's a part-time, in the evening, once a week stuff where they are struggling to fit a huge curricula into a small space. There are people coming in exhausted from a day at work, often in very demanding jobs, so finding the time, it is also going to be difficult, and if people are stale and exhausted, it's not going to be very helpful" (BA3).

BA3 also wondered if the mandatory inclusion of reflexive groups in ordination training might lead to their sabotage:

"You've got the people who will do their very best to undermine it. The people who are very defended, and we don't have enough psychological assessment pre-ordination training. So, there are people who will, whose defensiveness will undermine it. That would therefore be quite a waste of time for people, because there's only so much you can learn from that" (BA3).

BA3 was adamant about the insufficient time given over to matters of self-awareness, self-care and personal development in ordination training:

"BA3 You can't care for yourself if you don't know who you are, and how you tick, and where your weak spots are, and what your inner drivers are, and what your internal hard drive is messing you about so .....

PMG And you feel enough attention is given to that at ordination training?

BA3 No! Absolutely not! Our lot only had a weekend where they have three hours of listening skills. OK, and they also do a module on pastoral care and they have one of the sessions in that module is self-care which is what I taught last night – two hours. That's it!" (BA3).

BA6 was a Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) as well being a BA, and reflected this sense of inadequacy in ordination training within the CofE TEIs:

"This is as much as I can tell from the colleges. I know mostly the XXX colleges and to a lesser extent, XXX and our local course which is the XXX. My immediate reaction when you're talking is... they don't do what, in terms of counselling training we would think of as professional development groups, or personal development groups. So, XXX, for

example, which is a part-time course with a part-time structure that involves evening lectures, weekend – residential weekends and some tutorials, group tutorials. In their third year, one of their years, they run a limited time – I’m not sure how many sessions - it might only be 6 sessions, kind of closed group, which is a kind of personal development group. So, when I would challenge them, as I did about the personal development in clergy training, because I think it’s vital – actually more than vital, it’s woefully inadequate in my considered opinion - they will all say, ‘Oh, but we run this group’, and I would say, ‘Yes, but a group like that, that you run in the third year, it simply isn’t enough’. And in the residential colleges, I’d say there is even less. They may meet as some kind of support group, or tutorial group, but the focus is not on ‘doing process’, or structured, or facilitated, personal development at all” (BA6).

BA6 felt that one result of this was that the dioceses were paying ‘a small fortune’ in providing counselling for ordinands, because whilst they are training, ordinands’ personal development needs become heightened. This was supported by BA8. BA6 also highlighted some TEI principals’ opposition to reflexive groups as having no theological input.

“A certain number of principals of theological colleges have said there was no theological input. That’s where our Church is at, but some people do not see that God might actually work in the psychological milieu” (BA6).

BA6 also felt that reflexive groups in ordination training would be beneficial:

“If they had a positive experience of a group earlier in their training experience, it would make a difference. I think it makes a difference for our ordinands to be functioning in groups as human beings, as more evolving human beings, never mind as clergy which they know they may, or may not, become. I know of someone. He will go to a residential training college in XXX and be screwed up and because they won’t, I know – well I do know because I’ve visited there, that they are not functioning with a kind of psychological literacy. They won’t be providing a group context for him to process in. He is going to have massive issues – he’s just adopted two children, little babies, about balancing work and family life. His wife suffers from depression sometimes. There’s going to be a huge agenda for him around his hyper-conscientiousness and their needs which impacts on him and I observe that impacts on him physically and is affecting his physicality, and there is a vulnerability around that. So, the chances are that will not be addressed. That will just be played into, you know, there will be intellectual demands,

academic demands, there'll be demands to pray, demands to do this, demands to do the other and, 'Oh, it's all okay to invite your wife once a week!' But there will be no space in their terms of 8-10 weeks at XXX for him to say "actually, it's really difficult when I go home.' I am very clear about what they do and don't.... The Group is to make them aware of what is happening to them, and to raise their self-awareness and to highlight the humanity, that their vocation is to be a human being – and that's not separate from being a priest" (BA6).

"We often have a conversation domestically about the absence of personal development in clergy training; but in a way, I can't understand its absence. I was ordained quite young, like XXX in my 20s. We didn't have any personal development training at all. What we got were modules on counselling and psychology, which went fine, but were probably far more basic and interestingly less well-facilitated in terms of personal process and group process, than the previous training I had done; quite significantly so, because they were more presented as sets of skills and information. They weren't embedded in personal process and that's the thing that worries me – about everything to do with ordination training including the theology, is that it isn't embedded in personal process" (BA6).

It is clear from these statements that the BAs are adamant that insufficient opportunity is given to developing self-awareness and reflexivity in TEIs, and that many of them feel strongly that personal development should be given more credence and importance in the training of ordinands – and that the theological may even be found in the experience. However, this may conflict with the difficulties of making attendance mandatory (see **section 5.2.1.4**).

#### **5.2.1.6 Subordinate theme 1.6: Payment**

Although subsidised by the diocese as part of the BAs role, it was considered important that the incumbents contributed financially to the process as a way of enabling some form of ownership of the process:

"We do ask people to contribute financially to our group. I think that has some significance about ownership. Not a huge amount... My costs are covered by my contract with the diocese anyway. It's the work I do but the other facilitator is paid and then there is the room booking and basically and it doesn't cover all of it. The diocese contributes towards it but it's not expensive for the diocese actually because the other

facilitator doesn't charge what could be a going rate for an hour and a half's facilitation, so... I just think money is symbolic in therapeutic relationships too and I think that that just adds something" (BA5).

#### **5.2.1.7 Subordinate theme 1.7: Personality type**

I was curious to seek if groups would be better used by certain personality types than by others. BA4 felt that commitment was more important than personality type:

"Well, you'd have to commit to the group to benefit, don't you, and that's the other thing... I don't think this is about type, but you have to be prepared to be sufficiently open to, and reflective... to have a degree of emotional intelligence, and be prepared to examine oneself emotionally. I think everybody could benefit. Whether everybody would, depends on the commitment they give to the group. The more they bring to it, the more they get from it, in a sense. If someone's going to come along and not contribute or be very, very defended, well I suppose at some point that might be challenged by the group members anyway" (BA4).

The BAs seem to be indicating here that emotional literacy, psychological-mindedness and readiness to embrace the process are what is important. That may have implications for selection of candidates for training for ordination.

#### **5.2.1.8 Subordinate theme 1.8: Feeling safe**

BA2 talked about the need to feel safe in the group:

"Confidential in terms of what is discussed stays in the group and no reporting back, goes back to the nature of the group, what it's about. Not 'safe' in the sense of being non-challenging. There's quite a bit of challenge because members meet a lot. I mean, alongside with time is actually convenience and setting but thinking about – I mean there's other stuff around, which goes with commitment in terms of, I suppose what people want from the group as well; making, being clear from the beginning, in terms of when the group was set up about what people want from it" (BA4).

BA4 is emphasising the importance in being clear about the purpose of the group from the start, and about contracting confidentiality, as ways of helping the group to feel safe-enough to be vulnerable in.

BA7 also echoed the need for safety in the group...:

'...To take the mask off, perhaps to come without the dog-collar on. It is always quite interesting why they come with their dog-collar on for something like this, and to get them to reflect upon the fact that they are human beings before they became priests' (BA7).

#### **5.2.1.9 Subordinate theme 1.9: Purposeful**

BA4 felt that it was important that the group remained focussed on its purpose:

"What they asked for is a space to reflect, to share. That's what I've offered in terms of this is what it can be, and what do they want from it? And yes, that's what they want. They want to be able to bring, wherever they are, to bring themselves, wherever they are, so they may share the highs and the lows and share some very personal stuff. It's not just a place for a cosy cup of tea really. And yet, it maybe that one time, that's what everybody wants, but if that was to continue then that would be about, is this group still serving the purpose that it was set out to do?" (BA4).

It seems important that the facilitator's role, and the group's role, is to keep the group purposeful and focussed on the task of exploring process (see **section 5.2.1.3**). There is arguably a danger that without 'external' facilitation, it could become a social and collusive group.

### **5.2.2 Superordinate Theme 2: Group formats**

#### **5.2.2.1 Subordinate theme 2.1: Balint-type Groups**

Three of the BAs (BA2, BA5 and BA6) ran Balint-type Groups. BA2 described these as:

"The Balint group comes from groups which were originally set up for GPs. One doctor would speak about something which was particularly bothering him at the moment. The other group members would focus on it and explore it on a spiritual level, a psychological level, an emotional level and practical level, but they stay focussed on that one person's problems. At the end of that session, towards the end, everybody would then say how they identified with the person, so the person wouldn't feel isolated... (BA2)"

The size of the groups consisted of between six and eight people. BA2 operated the group as an open group, in that people would come and go when they changed their roles. BA2 thought that it

was important to keep the groups relatively homogeneous, e.g. for curates to be with curates, and for incumbents to be with incumbents, because:

“The idea of the Curacy is the fact that it is a professional adolescence, and that in order to really negotiate adolescence well, you have to fall out of love with your parent. So, therefore, unless they see their training incumbent as screwing up, they really don’t make good clergy themselves. In that rebellion, they can define themselves over and against someone before they then begin to understand each other; and so that’s why we separated the curates out, because they would particularly have to go through some sort of adolescence, and that’s easier to do with fellow curates” (BA2).

BA5 described the Balint groups as:

“One of the important things about it, is that there are two facilitators, and so I co-facilitate this group with somebody who is ordained, which I am not.... So we bring different skills to the group. In the first year, we had five people who were interested and we ran it with that number, and it was clear by the end of that first year that everybody who was in it wanted to continue. One person was actually moving on in their ministry to another diocese, but the other four wanted to continue. When we offered it again, another four people came forward so we had eight which was the number that we were looking for, and it’s actually become a slow open group. So what we find is one or two people leave, and one or two people come. That wasn’t necessarily my intention, but those who have been in it (and there are still some people in the group who have been in it from the start) have really found the ongoingness of it quite enriching, but the group’s managed to cope with other people” (BA5).

When asked about the impact of change on the group in terms of confidentiality and boundaries, BA5 stated,

“That would only happen at one point in a year, which is when the group comes to [an end]... sort of. It’s a calendar year, and so towards the end of the year, I say to everybody that the group is going to be running next year and if you would like to sign up for it again, please do. Those who wish to, do - and then I send out a email to all clergy to say there are some spaces in the group. And, that has seemed to work quite well.... People can’t just come and go. They commit to a year” (BA5).

BA5 described her groups’ structure as:



“So we meet – the dates of the year are set out – we meet somewhere which is neutral territory in the diocese but fairly centrally. It’s not an Anglican building, it’s actually a building which is owned by the XXXX, which has a number of meeting rooms and people can gather for a cup of coffee in a sort of half-hour slot before the formal time of the group begins, if they wish to; but the group begins at 11.00am and it finishes at 12.30pm. Those times, boundaries, are kept to very firmly. And there is an opportunity for two people to have forty-five minutes each to bring a particular pastoral situation or relationship - something that is currently preoccupying or challenging them that they would like to think about in the group. We don’t know until we meet in that group who is going to present, and it might be that somebody presents a couple of sessions on the trot and then doesn’t for a while. There is no sense that you’ve got to have your turn, so it’s left to the group to decide, and for people to make a bid for space. And then somebody sort of outlines the issue and it might be a new issue or again, there might be sometimes situations that people bring back, that have got an ongoing thing, as it were. We aim, as facilitators, to help the rest of the group explore the problem with the group member who is bringing it, to try not too much to impinge with their own stuff or their own experience, keep the focus on the task in hand, but also we will prompt with questions, such as you know ‘Why might this person be particularly difficult for you?’ Or ‘What is it about this situation’, which somebody else might feel is fairly straightforward, ‘feel so challenging?’” (BA5).

BA6 also ran Balint-style groups for clergy. BA6 made reference to an initiative between St. Luke’s Healthcare for the Clergy (an organisation that invests money in initiatives for supporting, and increasing, the well-being of clergy) and Salisbury diocese, based on providing Balint-style groups within all dioceses. However BA6 reported that not many dioceses had taken it up:

“One of the things that they were selling was really Mary Travis’s model, or similar. They had gone into partnership with the Diocese of Salisbury, because Salisbury Diocese had been working with that model and it was the Salisbury people who were there speaking on behalf of this package. So that package is being sold to all the dioceses in England. I don’t think there’s many that have taken it up... The XXXXX are saying well actually people aren’t buying into it” (BA6).

It seems important to understand how these Balint-type groups are run within a CofE context, and to gain a sense of their structure. It is evident from the data that they are an initiative that is being

pursued by St. Luke's Healthcare for Clergy, and it seems important to this research to understand something about that initiative (see **section 2.5**).

### **5.2.2.2 Subordinate theme 2.2: Accompanied Ministerial Development (AMD) Groups**

BA6 runs groups within an AMD programme:

"It's a training programme that the diocese has created for incumbent-status clergy. It involves them and working with their parishes, as sort of a parallel programme. It involves five four-day residential colleges in a year for twelve clergy, and, as part of that residential week, they have two action learning groups which is basically reflective practice groups. I facilitate one of those. That is specific for that group of clergy – for a restricted period of time, with the hope that perhaps some of them will continue to go on meeting because the diocese at the moment isn't running a programme of reflective practice groups, although some dioceses do have that option for their clergy" (BA6).

BA6 described the structure of the AMD groups as:

"Then we meet for an hour at the beginning and end of each of their residential colleges – there are five residential colleges. The first group is actually an hour and a half, or longer, because we do ground rules, boundary settings, all the kind of negotiating of the group, but also we do a process whereby they share the context they are working in. They tell us a bit about their parishes or themselves, but then thereafter, I run it pretty much along the lines of the Reflective Practice Work-Based Learning Group. So we will check in, and then we will go into process. Now in theory, the process is meant to be connected to their experience of their input from the AMD programme because it's a teaching programme, in the broadest sense. It's a space to reflect on how things have spoken to them... and also to reflect on how that has been mediated and played out in their parochial context. So, plenty of input/ output/ throughput kind of model. What's happened this week? What's really struck you? What stage were you? But when they come back to the next residential college, the Monday might be, 'So what's happened in the meanwhile, with this...?' There's a whole thing in the programme about it being approached in a holistic way. So, it could be anything really. What I think happens, is that the notion and in fact of course, it can become about anything. It can become about... well, 'it triggers this', or 'this has happened in my parish', or 'actually I can't concentrate because I'm getting immense grief because I want to move some pews and

I'm feeling really persecuted.....' 'Where the hell is God in this?' and 'What is happening within my ministry?'; 'What's happening to my family and my relationships?' It is like a holding space for whatever they want to bring in a sense, and yet clearly it's not a social space. So, the requirement for interaction which becomes obvious means that at some level the culture of the group is saying actually, 'this is about interacting differently and trying to be more honest about what you think but about what you feel and experience'" (BA6).

### **5.2.2.3 Subordinate theme 2.3: Work-Based Learning Groups**

Two of the BAs (BA1 & BA2) had experience of Work-Based Learning Group work in ordination training.

"All students of the Anglican Church in the XXX Diocese have had to go through a clinical pastoral education. We would run a group. Sometimes that would be filmed or videotaped, but they would actually look at what happened within the group, including gestures, words, reaching out towards other people, physically, emotionally and how that reflected what the person's own theology was. So, one person said, 'I think the clergy should be above conflict', and I reflected, 'sorry to hear that you don't believe in the incarnation, as Jesus came to get involved'. So we would actually look at that. It was co-led by either someone trained, such as myself, and one of the college tutors" (BA2).

It is not clear from this data how these groups operate, but their purpose seems to be about enhancing relationality and about growing theologically.

### **5.2.2.4 Subordinate theme 2.4: Self-Appraisal Peer Review Groups**

BA2 described running a group which he termed as 'Self-Appraisal Peer Review'. He described this group as coming from the nursing profession.

"How do you get people to co-support one another? So we got people to pair up... to look at where the crisis is. Part of it is debriefing. The other part is to say what, if you did your job well, as a nurse or a priest, whatever... how would you know it? For instance, would people, when you go on holiday, would they say that the church closed down in your absence? Would that be a mark of success? Or would the mark of success be, 'have you been away? We didn't even miss you. Things continued without you'. So you actually define that... how you would know, and then you look at where, what you need to learn, what you don't know, how you would get it. The first thing you do is to brag

about something you are very proud of to your partner, and then having bragged, say how can you do this even better? How can you make it more aware to other people? And then you say, 'the thing that drives me up the pole is this...' and having bragged, it's no bad thing to say what's vulnerable. You then switch, and the other person does the same for you. I did this for the diocese – we have 600 clergy in the diocese - and I said I would only do it if the bishops and archdeacons did it first - and they loved it. They met for what they call 'suppervision' (they would have a one course meal), pair up and go through, so that they could actually lean on one another and be vulnerable" (BA2).

This is a smaller form of group which is self-facilitated and tightly structured, and which can be conducted over a meal.

#### **5.2.2.5 Subordinate theme 2.5: Cell Groups**

Several of the BAs made reference to Cell Groups that exist in Theological Colleges. BA5 made reference to Cell Groups as being useful for clergy in training:

"I just hear about them. They are Cell Groups that start in college and I think they are usually, sort of four people meeting together to pray together, to offer mutual support and people do continue – some people continue – with those after and find them a good resource. I don't think they serve the same purpose as this kind of group because then they are not facilitated, but I think that they are very helpful for some people" (BA5).

BA4 also echoed the value of cell groups in curacy:

"I think these are ones which they've developed themselves throughout the three years of training, smaller groups, supported groups that people choose to meet regularly, and support each other's cell groups and that sort of thing, and I think that just happened, sort of organically because people are meeting regularly – every week or so, every month – and naturally fall into supporting groups. And they tend to be very sustaining and supportive. They just run themselves. And certainly in our diocese, what we find is that in curacy there is a lot of support. They meet regularly for training, CPD stuff. It's post-curacy when they are on their own..." (BA4).

However, BA3 had a different experience:

"We have a policy in the diocese whereby, during ordination training, they are encouraged to go into cell groups and part of the training time was given over to these

cell groups, which was not ideal because it was too rushed and people were in the wrong... it was the wrong atmosphere. I suspect that people tend, at that stage of training, to have a bit of a moan about this and that, and support each other. And there are lots of personal issues while people are in training, just as there are in counselling courses - so there will be mutual support for those... There's no external facilitator - no money! The hope is that those cell groups, or the experience of a cell group, stays with the person as they go into the ministry and that even if that cell group didn't work, they nevertheless find another one that does. Certainly in one of the year groups with which I am associated, that did happen and they've been, they are continuing. I think it can be variable" (BA3).

BA7 also didn't feel that Cell Groups provided space for sufficient depth of reflection:

'...Again where are the ground rules, the boundaries with that? There's none of those aspects that force people to go deeper. I think these groups can often become a more social group – students living in a goldfish bowl, it becomes less, again, if there's not a facilitator,' (BA7).

BA6 also referred to Cell Groups as being found in TEIs, but identified them as being very different from reflexive groups:

"In some colleges, you get the tradition of a cell group, and people go on meeting as a cell group... and sometimes when I raise this, particularly with some older clergy, like the Dean, or the Canon Precentor as was, they would say, "Oh but I'm in a cell group". What they mean is they are still meeting with three people they were at theological college with, and my guess would be that is not about personal development. It's a social, probably quite a collusive support group" (BA6).

These Cell Groups, whilst seemingly supportive, are not externally facilitated nor focussed on process. None of the TEIs (see **Chapter 4**) identified Cell Groups as a place for developing reflexivity.

#### **5.2.2.6 Subordinate theme 2.6: Peer Groups**

BA5 runs what she termed as 'Peer Groups'. Each consisted of six people (including the facilitator).

The group begins in the following way:

"So, we meet. We have coffee and biscuits for the first half hour or so. Then I say, 'Shall we start?' Then I ask if anybody wants some time. We meet for two hours. The first half-

hour is general chit-chat (arriving) and then we have an hour and a half of group time” (BA5).

They are open groups, in that if BA5 has a space, she will advertise it in the diocese, and then operate the following system:

“If I receive a request to join the group, then I first put it to the group... do they want somebody else to join? I [name them] once I’ve had their permission to do so. To the person that has contacted me, I say, ‘I’ll let you know’, and then the permission, ask the group and then I do – it’s been okay in most cases – in normal cases. They are all ordained, and the person that wanted to join was a curate and it was felt, by both parties actually, that maybe a group for curates might be more appropriate because the issues that come up are particularly relevant for curates rather than those in full-time ministry. Both said, ‘more than happy for them to join’, but the sort of issues that they tend to raise and discuss tend to be issues pertaining to their particular ministry” (BA5).

In Peer Groups, the groups have responsibility for who joins them. The data in this section raises issues about the make-up of the group, and how appropriate it is to mix people with different stages of experience, especially when they are still in training.

#### **5.2.2.7 Subordinate theme 2.7: Previous ordination training**

Two of the BAs (BA1 and BA6) experienced their own ordination training in reflexive groups, in the 1960 and 1970s:

“For three years, a group of us sort of lived together. We never had lectures as such. We did work and then we met in groups with papers, discussions, whatever. The group also went away to do experiential work. My group went away to XXX to work. I had a big induction to XXX and then did six month placement in various social services. This was part of XXX. And then we did six months working, earning our keep. I went into field work in XXX and then six months before that we were ordained deacons and went into parishes – different sorts of parishes and met as a group every week” (BA6).

BA1 also experienced his training for ministry using work-based learning groups (or fraternities):

“...it divided into yet another series of groups, known as fraternities... Each fraternity is intended to be a cross-section of the whole college, with all the main interests and activities represented, and it consists of seven or eight full members including a member

of staff or a senior priest, with others, such as wives, attending occasionally. The purpose of these fraternities was expressed as follows, “a personal framework within each member of the college may develop his Christian commitment and spirit of service... It is interesting that they were already there, and we did benefit from a whole year of working in groups throughout the whole session, and I think it set up, for me a pattern of thinking about ministry which has never really gone away. So, I’m always assuming there’s a group with me” (BA1).

The data reveal that ordination training was once facilitated in groups, which both BAs found immensely helpful in developing their self-awareness. It is not clear why, or when, this method of training ceased.

#### **5.2.2.8 Subordinate theme 2.8: Reflective Practice Groups**

BA7 stated that his diocese used to run Work-Based Learning Groups, but that the name had been changed to Reflective Practice Groups because ‘that sounded a bit long and unwieldy so we changed it to Reflective Practice Groups’ (BA7).

“I guess the other issue is when you say “work-based” on a course, it is work-based... but a clergy person’s life is holistic. It includes the family and the home and all of that aspect. So, when we say, “work-based”, it sounds a bit too narrow in one sense. Perhaps “Reflective Practice Groups” seems a bit more of what we are actually doing” (BA7).

BA7 described Reflective Practice Groups as:

“We have our own particular style which is that we have groups of between four and six in a group. There’s a commitment once a month, apart from August, for about 2½ hours. So, they will all have about at least certainly twenty minutes each, to just talk themselves without really any interruptions, and we commit ourselves to a two-year programme. So they are committed for two years, with a facilitator... All of the facilitators are counsellors... We do end the group after two years and we start afresh. People can roll over, but it is making a new commitment and it may be with a different facilitator. Certainly it’s a new group. It’s not a continuation of a group, and these groups are fixed in the sense that once we start, nobody else joins them. They are closed for two years” (BA7).

BA8 also ran a Reflective Practice Group along similar lines to BA7. BA8 defined their purpose as:

‘...to reflect upon how do their personal lives and their inner lives and their social lives and their family lives, how do they affect their ministry and how does their ministry affect that, so it is about the whole’ (BA8).

### **5.2.3 Superordinate Theme 3: Benefits**

#### **5.2.3.1 Subordinate theme 3.1: Facilitate thinking and gaining insight**

BA5 felt that one of the purposes of the group was to facilitate thinking and awareness of personal process in relation to the situations that are encountered.

“We are gradually aiming to help people think, not just about the situation, but what they’re bringing to it and what they may be bringing to it that is unconscious, or certainly less conscious for them... It’s obviously done in a much slower and less direct way than would be in a one-to-one therapeutic situation. But what happens is that people gradually begin to reveal, at their pace, parts about themselves, things about their personal history, things about their family history, and links are made between that and the situation that is being discussed. But that’s taken time – and that’s part of the reason why obviously the commitment is so important, not just because of the trust but because people start to know each other’s stories. So gradually, and I think this has taken a long time, but other group members have developed the confidence to say that, you know, ‘You always have a problem with being a bit of a victim, and maybe here you are buying into that again’. Whereas before, it was more the facilitators who made those sorts of comments and so... They do get a bit brave about saying, you know, ‘feeling excluded is a real issue for you and that’s been a theme really in the material you’ve brought’, whatever it is, or ‘you do get very angry and very worked up. What is it, and is it actually more about these difficult people or, in your own congregation, is there something about you here?’ And that can actually sometimes lead to quite profound insight, and it’s quite moving when those kinds of connections are made for people. So there’s a real growth and insight that comes from... We are aiming for that” (BA5).

Here, the data reveal something about the shifts (growth) that can occur in sensitively challenging each other in the group.

BA7 also stated that Reflective Groups were a good place to challenge thinking and offer support:



“The Church of England doesn’t close churches. All we do is give young and inexperienced people, where someone in their 60’s... their very first post - thirteen churches to look after. What are we doing to these people? They are giving them an impossible job and we are surprised when they break, and I think the Reflective Group gives chance for people to reflect back and think I don’t understand how they can even do that job, and get them to begin to think in that more holistic way – it takes it away from it being always them - they always say “it must be me,” and I say, “what was it like before somebody else came?” Well they had a terrible time! ‘What does that tell you?’” (BA7).

“An example would be PCCs, where they’re having really great difficulties, and when it’s a safe enough group to reflect upon, saying more, “how do you think you can manage this differently? What you’ve been doing isn’t working. How can you manage it differently? What are the options?” So that we are not giving all these answers from the other people, but helping them to realise... to do something different, and then having them come back and said, “yes, I’ve tried that and I feel quite empowered.” So, I’ve seen that change” (BA7).

BA8 felt that the development of self-awareness was an important aspect of the group:

‘...enabling clergy to become more self-aware, developing resilience and ways of managing different situations and relationships within parishes’ (BA8).

BA8 also felt that the group enabled participants to stop and become more aware of their process:

“Yes, I mean certainly we say try starting from there because it seems to always be inevitably what has been built up around them is this failure to be congruent because of the work that they are involved in because they are clergy, they would appear in and say “gosh, I did five funerals last week!” “You only took five, my goodness, I took eight”, and there is that sense in which they are on a day to day basis presented with painful, confusing, frightening situations that they are amazingly good at being with, but then they tuck away all the feelings about it and don’t listen to them, can’t deal with them – there isn’t the space. He might have just taken the funeral of a baby and within half an hour he was going to meet a very cheerful, newly-engaged couple and you have to put on your different professional face and you don’t do anything with the feeling, and I think it leads to a great deal of inauthenticity and lack of congruence inside them and I

think one of the biggest pieces in the early part of the group is the facilitators being able to say, “no, no, just stop there. What did that feel like? How might that have affected the rest of your day, when you went back and kicked the cat, in the evening, would it have been connected to?” So having someone who is outside their group of clergy who is able to say “this is amazing, what you are doing! Actually are you recognising what is happening?” (BA8).

### **5.2.3.2 Subordinate theme 3.2: Respecting difference**

BA5 felt that learning to respect difference was an important part of the group process:

“Some of the other spin-offs of being in a group like that are clergy from very different church person-ships meeting together, and interestingly for us that has never got in the way for people. I think sometimes, some clergy have been a bit kind of... - for a while we had somebody in the group who was from a very evangelical charismatic background, but very keen to learn about himself and some of the things he described as going on in his church, I know for other clergy was testing - was not easy to hear - but it didn't ever get into discussion of the rightness or wrongness of that, as long as it stayed with the difficulties of it with this particular priest” (BA5).

The data reveal that learning to be alongside ‘difference’ can be a struggle, but also be beneficial.

### **5.2.3.3 Subordinate theme 3.3: Self-care**

Three of the BAs felt that participation in such groups enabled better self-care (e.g. BA5, B7 and BA4).

“Personal growth in terms of self-care... That people are internalising the model unconsciously in a sense that it's just going on but sort of self-reflection and self-questioning, and deepening their insight about themselves. I hope that enables them to look after themselves more effectively and also, because there's an experience of vulnerability, I think that it enables... hopefully people feel they can ask for help more easily. We know that clergy don't find that easy, and that there's a lot of isolationism for priests in the church, and so I think another aspect of the group is a kind of overcoming that sort of isolationist dependency, enabling people to meet and talk at depth and I don't think that happens a lot actually” (BA5).

BA4 saw one of the values of the group as being preventative:

“It’s a big umbrella term as ‘well-being’ in sustaining oneself in ministry. Part of essential self-care coming from... I mean there are lots of things that feed into preventing clergy isolation, and that doesn’t mean that the clergy person is isolated in the sense of not having any friends, or colleagues, or lives alone, but actually a confidential space to talk and reflect” (BA4).

BA7 saw the value of the groups as being able to step back and examine what is going on in their lives:

‘...Just to help them to reflect from their own concept of boundaries. The clergy are very poor, you know, they allow themselves to be bullied. And so it’s not just the parish’s fault. Actually the clergy often do not have boundaries, do not have work boundaries and they allow people to abuse them and therefore I think in a safe environment, we can help them to reflect on that and what way is it helping. How else could you do it? One thing I’m often saying is, “have you ever thought of working only five days a week?” Most clergy will look at me in horror – impossible! I don’t see why not actually. Consultants do, doctors do, so why can’t you?’ (BA7).

So the data suggest that reflective groups are a good place to model and internalise useful aspects of time-management, listening to self, and other skills that enable better self-care, as well as being a space to share what is going on within one’s own psychological process and life.

#### **5.2.3.4 Subordinate theme 3.4: Pastoral encounter**

Enabling better relational skills was identified as a benefit of reflexive groups (e.g. BA5). It was felt that this would enhance and heighten ability in pastoral encounters. BA5 stated that:

“We have talked about self-insight and so on but also, as we implied that hopefully then has an implication for a kind of praxis, theological praxis as it were, and so I think that they think quite a lot, for example, that they are learning about pastoral interaction and I hope that they feel that they are learning how to do that better for themselves in the ministry. I think they are, and again people come back and sort of report that they’d handled something in a particular way and it had gone differently... I think that they’ve learned to expand their emotional repertoire a bit in terms of different kinds of interaction including more difficult ones, which again, are often repeating in their local parish situations which are often avoided because people fear the kind of conflict, or whatever, and I think that people have... I can think of a number of people in the group

who, you know, as a result of... they'll often say something like, 'I felt like I had the group behind me when I was in this situation, and I can't tell you how strengthening that felt' (BA5).

The data here are revealing the reflective group as a place in which clergy can learn different ways of interaction which can then be taken out into parish life and pastoral encounter. There is also the sense of the 'group' being behind them as a form of moral support, which comes from the supportive 'belonging' nature of the group.

#### **5.2.3.5 Subordinate theme 3.5: Challenge theology**

BA5 felt that sometimes personal theology was challenged and growth could come from that experience.

"Occasionally... but not to have an academic theological discussion. It might be more in terms of people finding themselves thinking about particular bits of biblical teaching, and thinking how do I make sense of that in this situation, when everything feels contrary to that or whatever... And I think that's okay to grapple with something in that way. I come back to the fact that I don't think that's the purpose of the group but that is something that can happen as part of what's going on. It can happen that people grow theologically. I mean, in a way, I think that where people relate deeply and reveal their humanity to one another, then theological growth ought to happen" (BA5).

Otherwise, the group was sometimes used to explore personal challenges with theology:

"There may be a reference... I'm just trying to think – sometimes people may reference something from something that they have read or a biblical reference or theological thoughts they've read or whatever... The group members tend to facilitate each other a great deal. I suppose my role is more to hold that and to make an intervention if appropriate. Sometimes the other group members will as well, so general theological reflection, that's – it's not something that is particularly there any more than anything else really" (BA4).

In BA4's group, any differences with theology are sensitively facilitated:

"It is and actually, they are very honest, quite brutally honest sometimes with each other – increasingly. I don't know about the second group yet because they've only met twice – it's early days. I am just thinking, the reason I'm hesitating is that when I tried to

set up a group once, another group, this was a potential group of curates, there was some very, in talking about that within the group, there was some very conservative evangelical couple of potential members and much more, sort of middle-of-the-road and traditional Anglicans and there was already a tension there because of – and it was also a tension about what they wanted from the group, which was how to do this, how to be more creative in ministry, how to do that, but they were all – and I’m just thinking really, I haven’t got any in the groups, none of the group members are very conservative.

However, BA7 stated that theology didn’t ‘happen’ much in the groups that he facilitated:

“It clearly is a psychological group. We are dealing with self-awareness, support, Johari window stuff basically. Helping them to reflect on how people see them etc. in allowing them to be open and to share in a way that they don’t elsewhere. Theology – God – where’s God in all of this? It is interesting because God doesn’t often come up in the subject.... Well, there is, particularly for those who appear to be very hurt or damaged and have perhaps lost God-concepts and I think there... I’d like to think it creates a space... and I say with my bereavement thing or whatever, because there’s a spiritual shift – churches need to help people to go through a spiritual shift. Teach them how to pray differently. Don’t think they have to go back to who they were with their relationship with God, and I think effectively it does allow that space for spiritual shifting” (BA7).

BA8 stated that her groups were initially set up to be non-theological:

“In the early days, the aim was to enable the church to acknowledge the psychology, because the spiritual aspects are obviously already there - the theological is already there. There seemed to be some resistance to accepting the fact that the clergy were human beings. They also have bodies and they also have minds, so I think I have very much held it there and continued in that without actually – with a sort of acknowledgement that spiritualism was there, if it needs to be said. There was a need to park the theology in order to reach the psychological, in a sense... Theology can be very head-orientated, but then so can psychology, as you and I know, and we can all get caught up in our theories and models which are the only ones – against anybody else’s. So it is trying to enable that much more heart-led aspect of it” (BA8).

The data reveal that the main purpose of these groups is not theological, but rather the greater emphasis is on the psychological. However, as the theological and the psychological are not compartmentalised, both have a place as long as the process doesn't become intellectualised, but stays close to 'feeling' and experiencing.

#### **5.2.3.6 Subordinate theme 3.6: Church life**

BA3 strongly felt that participation in reflexive groups would enhance a Minister's capacity to engage more effectively in Church life:

"People are coming with a much more fluid attitude to their ministry, to theology, to all of the different changes that are going on in their lives as a result of doing the training; and also it seems to me that they are vital because you are working all the time with people, and the dynamics of working with people is very, very complex because your congregations and your non-congregations - other people in the parish – there are all sorts of different psychological levels. So, you are quite often dealing with a host of projections which you become the focus of - the neediness associated with all sorts of insecurities, attachments, stuff earlier on. You become the omnipotent, you know, the equivalent of omnipotent God or perfect mother Church, or whatever it happens to be, and you obviously are not. But if you have done no personal work and if you, yourself, are insecure which many of these ordinands are, many people are – most human beings are - then you're not going to be able to recognise these projections nor to hand them back appropriately. And if you've got nowhere to take the sort of destructive consequences of that, you are going to be in deep, deep trouble. So, I think to be part of a group while you are training gives you the experience and safety of actually understanding that it is possible to explore these things securely and safely and to be held, and that there are things to be explored and that sometimes it is the only other people, not you yourself who can see some of the patterns and the connections and the places where you are needing further support. So, I think it's a really, really good idea and anything, anything, and that's only one way but it is a way of providing and training your self-awareness and has to be encouraged" (BA3).

BA6 also saw the value of being part of a reflexive group as being enabling of a better ministry:

"I was thinking that if you have ordinands working together in personal development groups, one of the things that hopefully they would learn, as well, is that you could do this with your parishioners. Because one of the problems is they seem to come out with

the notion that, well I suppose there's always the notion that they will always facilitate, but in theory the knock-on isn't simply collegial in terms of how you are with your peer group of clergy, but how you might be in your parish and that even if you were, you could liberate yourself from the idea that you had to run everything. You might enable other people to run groups more effectively and trust in that process more, as well as maybe participate in a different way, as a human being with your lay colleagues and we are very interested in Churches in terms of building ministry teams which means working with lay people in an equal and open and trusting way. Well, that won't work if we can't do it" (BA6).

BA8 felt that participating in RPGs enables a better understanding of groups in church life.

"It has been very educative because with an able facilitator, you can have an experience of how a group can operate differently. Those who may have difficulty managing their PCCs or being in chapter, can have fed back to them how they are experienced in a group; how they can participate in a group and how do you present and how can you give feedback in a way that is creative and not advice-giving, and so actually there is a lot of group education in two years" (BA8).

Again, here in the data, is the importance of developing an awareness of self and others to enable clergy to separate out, and have insight into, the dynamics that can occur in ministry. This also enables a more collegial form of ministry to develop.

#### **5.2.3.7 Subordinate theme 3.7: Personal and theological development**

Personal and theological development was identified as important functions of the group. BA1 spoke about how much he learned about himself and how he operated relationally from his work-based learning group – and this had enabled him to learn about the relational nature of God:

"So one of the purposes of such a group would be to learn about one's interactions with other people and how we impact on others and how they impact on us and that kind of thing. I learned everything from them - theologically funnily enough, you know. It seemed to me to be at the heart of this relational view of God for example" (BA1).

As in **section 5.2.3.5**, the purpose of the group may not be to develop theological awareness, but for BA1, it has offered useful theological insights and opportunities for theological reflection.

### 5.2.3.8 Subordinate theme 3.8: Different from other groups

Because the Church was acknowledged as being a very political<sup>18</sup> organisation, it was felt that Reflexive Groups offered a space to be as non-political as possible.

“Chapter meetings, or whatever, should be places for support. They’re not... they are just not. I occasionally visit chapters to go and talk about my role and you know, they have, they tend to be sort of oh... you know... here’s a thousand leaflets that need to be distributed between us for such and such a Sunday. All this kind of stuff, and very much practical, bureaucratic concerns, and then they say, ‘oh and we have got XXXX here today, and so you are our speaker and would you like to speak now?’ and I try and I think sometimes they have other people who come and visit, but they don’t feel to me like places, and clergy said to me I couldn’t open up in my chapter, I couldn’t be that vulnerable” (BA5).

BA7 echoed the same concerns about Chapter meetings:

“Chapter meetings are not confidential. They are competitive. They are optional and they are not always the healthiest of groups” (BA7).

Care was taken as to the make-up of the groups to avoid external politics pervading the space. This was echoed by BA4, who said:

“Only in so far as most people say the Chapter is the last place I would go to, to bring any of these issues because they are not seen as a supportive space. People can feel very isolated in Chapter. They can feel very competitive. It’s not a place to be vulnerable. It’s more of a place where, you know, they put on a brave face – everything’s fine and the competitive, a lot of people talk about the competitive nature of Chapters. “Oh, I’ve done so many funerals, I’ve done so many weddings”. This sort of thing can creep into it. Not all Chapters. There are some that are very supportive, or felt to be, but I know clergy that won’t go to Chapter, you know, and then they’re much larger anyway – bigger groups” (BA4).

BA6 also emphasised the difference with other Church groups of clergy:

“...and that is requiring them to interact about what they are doing and feeling, not in the sort of – I want to say ‘Boys’ Club’ but it can be ‘Girls’ Club’ too of Chapters... professional chat. All the things like competition and the dishonesty that really is

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Political’ in the sense of containing people who are motivated by self-serving interests, in gaining power or pleasing people.



around... Sussing out everyone's Churchmanship and what colleges they went to and all that stuff... Who you know. Who I know. Yes, so the requirement for interaction which becomes obvious that at some level means the culture of the group is saying actually, 'this is about interacting differently and trying to be more honest about what you think but about what you feel and experience'" (BA6).

The data show that the groups that are often encountered in the CofE are not spaces to be vulnerable in, so one benefit is to have a place that is free from the institutional politics. This needs careful managing. Yet, the importance of getting it 'right' is crucial:

"I found once you get the confidentiality, clergy begin to open up and will often say, 'I've got nowhere else to share like this'" (BA7).

#### **5.2.3.9 Subordinate theme 3.9: Countering isolation**

Several of the BAs recognised the isolation of the Clergy and felt that groups were a valuable way of countering isolation:

"Given that I run groups, I've got five in each; given the size of the diocese, it's a tiny, tiny proportion of those actually seeking it and those in the group. They all say everybody should have this. The peer group is a place where the members can also reflect on the person – the self – rather than on their role as a priest. It is also a space where the life and death issues priests regularly deal with can have a regular outlet for dealing with the impact of this on themselves and in a place where they won't be judged. Many (not all) clergy do feel isolated in their role and the group can provide a space where ministry can feel less isolating because it is shared and examined with a group of supportive colleagues" (BA4).

BA7 shared this sense of the Group countering isolation:

"I think they normalise clergy life, because clergy are very cocooned in their little world – in their little problems, and I think it can be very helpful to hear other people describing issues that may not be identical, but very similar to themselves; and secondly, they observe for two years, highs and lows, and there does seem to be dramatic highs and lows, and I think that is also quite reflectively healthy for them, and gets them out of the goldfish bowl thinking, 'it's all me'" (BA7).

However, BA3 had an entirely different experience of work with clergy in a group which had been formed to support clergy who were identified as being isolated:

“I’ve done one reflective group for isolated clergy, but they weren’t ordinands. That was a group that the bishops selected because they were clergy who didn’t seem to be able to work collaboratively, who were feeling stuck, isolated and overworked and resentful. So the bishops thought it would be a good idea to put them all in a group - and so they came, with great reluctance because they were sent, and they found it quite difficult to engage with the group process. There was always a funeral, or something else that meant that unfortunately they were unable to come. So, we never got, only twice I think in a year, all cohort of five. They were very defensive, and things were very ‘out-there’ and it was hard work” (BA3).

BA3’s experience potentially challenges the notion that such groups would be helpful to clergy who are isolated, because possibly their isolation is caused by an inability to engage with others.

BA6 also highlighted the value of reflexive groups in countering isolation:

“It is making people feel connected. Time after time, we’ve had – sorry two of the most outstanding have been women, where they felt incredibly isolated in rural parishes or groups of rural parishes, so coming in to do the AMD, and being in a group and just being together has kind of transformed their experience of ministry, because Chapters are simply not – people say, ‘Oh, you have Chapters’ – but Chapters, nine times out of ten, are simply not functioning in a way...” (BA6).

BA8, likewise, highlighted the countering of isolation as being a benefit of Reflective Practice Groups:

“I had this completely fantasy idea that actually being a clergy person in a rural area would be very delightful and far less stressful than in the urban clergy that I have met with before, and of course, when I got there, I found this was not the case at all. A lot of them seemed to be very isolated. They were working in multi-benefices. People were always disappointed in them - whichever church, they didn’t have time. People were disappointed that they weren’t going to give them more time and that’s a very unhealthy psychological place to be around people who are constantly disappointed in you... Parochial clergy, on a day-to-day basis, get very little affirmation, certainly from colleagues. So there was a real sense of meeting with people who were quite isolated. They were often quite anxious, about whether they were doing a good enough job,

anxious whether their clergy in the next door parish was doing better, or had more Messy Churches running or whatever it was. So, there's a good deal of isolation and anxiety [which was helped] once they were able to form the relationships in the confidentiality of the group" (BA8).

The data reveal clear benefits in countering isolation. However, the data usefully state that not all priests can relate, and for those who can't relate, being sent to a Reflective Group as a form of support will not necessarily be helpful.

#### **5.2.3.10 Subordinate theme 3.10: Experiencing vulnerability**

BA3 spoke about the need for clergy to experience vulnerability in order to enable them to accompany others in their vulnerability:

"Being in a group is a very vulnerable experience, and therefore I think it's really important that people learn that; and they also learn that there are some people with whom they are never going to get on. There are some people with whom it is not safe to be vulnerable, and therefore they learn something about discernment, and hopefully an understanding that there are going to be some parishioners who will never find them to be the right person and not to expect to be all things to all people... But at the same time, also to learn that because you are vulnerable and you have learned that you can express that vulnerability, and it is very helpful indeed to express it with somebody, to know that you have got to choose the right people. You can't just be sort of letting loose on everybody! So that's discernment I think really." (BA3).

Again, the personal insight and learning that can come from these groups is useful in parish interactions. BA3's reference to 'learning to be vulnerable' is particularly useful in some pastoral encounters where one feels helpless and lost for words.

'You see people coming who are emotionally in tears with abuse, basically, going on in a parish, the PCC treating people in a very atrocious way, but you also are able to mirror and help them to self-reflect upon events' (BA7).

### **5.2.3.11 Subordinate theme 3.11: Person to person**

BA3 identified the use of groups over the use of journaling in developing reflexivity as:

“The advantages of the use of groups over things like journaling and reflective statements and things like that, are because it’s person to person. Journaling is valuable, but I think even if they don’t go to a group, they need one person as a spiritual accompanier, mentor, pastoral supervisor, whatever you choose, but somebody who is able to listen and reflect back and, because your journal doesn’t respond to you the way a person does, so it’s not two-way” (BA3).

Here, the benefit of the human encounter in developing reflexivity is evident.

### **5.2.3.12 Subordinate theme 3.12: Negotiating boundaries**

BA1 spoke about the usefulness of the groups in his ordination training as teaching him how to negotiate boundaries:

“If I was going to say anything about all this work, it is this wonderful negotiating of boundaries. How important that is in life, let alone in ministry, you know... this whole awareness of constantly having to redraw boundaries and be aware of them and manage them - whether they are permeable boundaries or rigid ones” (BA1).

BA7, likewise, felt that the teaching of boundaries within the group was advantageous in modelling good boundaries for priests in not always taking responsibility for others:

“It does take them two, three or four months – even longer for one or two – before they really get it, that we don’t phone each other up, we don’t offer to meet up in any capacity in between [sessions], to ask for prayer requests and all that kind of thing. We are boxed, and when you walk out that door you won’t hear from me for a month, and I will e-mail you rarely, unless you are not turning up. I will not want to e-mail you every month. You’ve got the dates – I won’t wet-nurse you. If you don’t turn up, you don’t turn up - but people will say, “Where’s XXXX?” “I don’t know” (BA7).

## **5.2.4 Superordinate Theme 4: Hindrances**

### **5.2.4.1 Subordinate theme 4.1: Time**

All of the BAs felt that the inability of clergy to commit the time, was a hindrance factor. BA5 described it in this way:

“I think that’s why a lot of clergy don’t take this up because they – I mean for four years we ran eighteen sessions a year. This year, I’ve done fourteen sessions just to make it slightly less time-intensive as I thought that was an issue for people. For some clergy, even the thought of meeting with their colleagues in that kind of setting, fortnightly, I think just might have felt too much” (BA5).

However, BA3 felt that the Church needed to address this culture of busyness to prioritise time for the development of self-awareness:

“Cultural busy-ness needs to be attacked, because people will say they are too busy, there are too many other things to do, but actually if the church really, really recognises that self-awareness is fundamental to the efficacy of somebody in ministry, then it’s a priority, and there should be time” (BA3).

There is a perception that clergy are busy people. Whether that really is the reality, or whether it is an issue of poor boundaries and time management, that is certainly the perception that many clergy have of themselves. This prevents them from prioritising the space in their diaries for such group support.

#### **5.2.4.2 Subordinate theme 4.2: Scary**

Because engaging ‘at depth’ is not something that many clergy do (according to the BAs experience), it was thought by several BAs to be scary.

“I think the cost of opening up to a whole load of people, on that kind of regular basis, is scary for people” (BA5).

Because self-reflection is not in the culture of many clergy, engaging at that level of personal honesty and vulnerability with others is potentially scary. If it were a culture created in their initial theological training, I wonder if it could be more readily engaged with.

#### **5.2.4.3 Subordinate theme 4.3: Needs are too big**

Sometimes, people left the group because their needs were too much, either for the participant, or the group, to handle. BA5 stated that,

“The two people who, over the five years I’ve been doing the group, have left. It has become clear that their needs were too big for the group. In both cases, they just couldn’t somehow use the group. Their needs have just been utterly overwhelming and

somehow they couldn't bear the group and the sharing or something. They'd get sort of very frustrated and angry, somehow, within the group where you felt there was a different agenda somehow, something going on. I think unconsciously they might have had unreal expectations of the group actually, so they had to find a way to leave it and in the end I think that was probably better that that happened" (BA5).

There is an indication here that SRG-type groups may not be for everyone in that psychological or relational damage may exacerbate difficulties for the groups and for the individuals.

#### **5.2.4.4 Subordinate theme 4.4: Boundaries**

Careful selection of candidates for each group emerged as a theme, as dual-boundaries may act as a hindrance to full use of the group experience:

"If I felt there was going to be a boundary clash of people who were working too much together already outside, I'd address that and talk about it, but I'd probably not put them in the same group together. But I haven't had to do that" (BA5).

BA4 stated that many of her group participants travel some distance to what might be thought of as a 'neutral' space, so as to avoid dual-boundaries.

"Yes, they generally all travel to it and appreciate being outside their deanery in what is a neutral space for all of them, completely neutral, but it is a space away from their parishes and they specifically wanted that" (BA4).

BA3 had actual experience of the hindrance factor of not taking into better consideration the mix of the group and their potential dual-boundaries:

"Also the fact that there was only one woman and four men. Three of the men came from the same Deanery which was a very male dominated deanery, so the Deanery-Chapter competitiveness remained. So, the showing of vulnerability was the last thing they wanted to do because they were like that any way, and so the last thing they wanted to do was to be engaged in doing this in public" (BA3).

The consequences of these dual-relationships were:

"Any question of looking more deeply at what might be going on, and what internal drivers there might be, or of helping others to explore where they might be, that wasn't what they wanted so they tended to be full of – if we ever got anywhere near something

significant, then they would change the subject, get full of anecdotes, problem solved, anything” (BA3).

However BA3 realised that it was not always possible to be mindful of dual boundaries:

“To be put in a group where there is somebody with whom there is antipathy and which could lead to bullying or stifling of your own stuff and it won’t be addressed, that would be destructive. So I do think it’s better to have some element of choice in this but often, of course, that’s not possible. It would depend on geography who you were with. I was facilitating last night, and somebody said, “well, I’ve got no choice because I can’t travel. So I have to be with people near me, but there is one person that I know I just don’t want to talk to”. So, I’m not sure it’s going to be very helpful for her, but it might be” (BA3).

BA6 also took care in the make-up of the groups:

“So we do look at it in terms of are there any obvious personality issues or previous divisions in this cohort? Are there any Churchmanship issues, like we don’t want the most ‘forward in faith’ one in with our most radical feminist theological lesbian, for example, ideally. So we do gerrymander the group... We would try and not have one woman and five men. We would try, perhaps to have two women in the group... So we take some care with that and also whether there are connections with the facilitators, because sometimes there are, you know equally, you want to – you probably know there is too much of a dual relationship” (BA6).

#### **5.2.4.5 Subordinate theme 4.5: Prayer**

Perhaps unexpectedly (given the clergy context), three of the BAs felt that prayer didn’t have a place in reflexive groups, as it could be a hindrance factor. BA5 stated:

“I just don’t feel that the purpose of the group is to have prayer, just as I personally wouldn’t pray with somebody in an individual therapy session and wouldn’t feel that that was appropriate. It is interesting that sometimes, at the end of a group, you often find a bit of an unconscious theme running through the group and you find that although ostensibly different, that the two presentations actually have thrown up similar themes and at the end of a group, one of us might make a sort of bit of a gathering comment and if it has been a particularly emotionally charged group, there is often just a little moment of silence which sort of happens naturally and I think that is

just a sort of an awareness of something being shared and that is enough, yes... I suspect it puts off some of our more closed evangelical brothers and sisters. I think the open ones would be okay, but I think that you know, they would sort of, 'why can't this happen?' sort of thing... It's part of their church culture, but on the other hand, having a different start to a meeting which usually begins and ends in prayer, is also helpful" (BA5).

For BA4, the experience was similar, except that it was the group that requested that they don't pray, because every Church group begins and ends with prayer, and it was important to the group that this group was different:

"One of the things we talked about in the beginning was about the group members might come from... theologically their needs are in different places. It's about respecting difference. And we talked about the place of prayer in the group and what they wanted to do about that, and they all said they would not want to start with prayer. Because that sort of becomes an expectation – and every meeting starts with prayer and so it was agreed that, and not only that but then it's "who's turn is it now"? And I just want to come here and I just want to be and I don't want to think, "oh, I've got to do the prayers today" (BA4).

BA8 also highlighted the impact that prayer can have on what has been shared:

"...prayer, and that is a really interesting one because my sense of that is where group members in the early starting off of the group, very occasionally, actually surprisingly, have said, "do we start with prayer or can we end with a prayer?" and of course, I would always say, absolutely, we will now be silent for five minutes. Is it helpful or not, particularly at the end? And a new colleague came to supervision in the early stages and said it was awful because right at the end so-and-so bobbed up and basically disabled the whole of the material of the group by putting it into prayer. So I think, it is really important to be prayerful about the group and I hope they are before they come in, or that we can certainly end with silence and bring those things to God - but actually words are not necessarily the valuable part, and some clergy have found it very difficult" (BA8).

Rather than this being about the use or non-use of prayer, per se, the importance here is in keeping reflective groups 'different' from other groups that clergy are used to being in. As prayer marks the beginning and end of much group activity that the clergy engage in, the non-use of prayer is a way of



making the space 'different'. Prayer can also negate (spiritualise away) what has been shared in the group.

#### **5.2.4.6 Subordinate theme 4.6: Lacking Commitment**

BA4 felt that the inability to commit to the process could hinder the benefits of reflexive groups:

"Lack of commitment... committing to the time, committing to attending.... making the time. Yes, and I think that's one of the reasons may be that they don't because how can I spare the time to come? Especially if they are coming a long way. Geographically, there's an hour to get there and then..., so essentially they are giving up a morning, making the time in the diary for that is certainly a factor and one person recently commented on that, you know, newly first-time incumbent, "I don't think I've time for this. I've had to hit the ground running", and actually somebody said, "this is exactly why you do need to come." And she said, "actually yes, you are right". So, making that time... prioritising..., and that goes back to that thing if self-care is considered to be something essential then, prioritise it. So that's one thing both committing to time, committing to the process and you've got to feel safe" (BA4).

Commitment, here, is not just about time (as in **section 5.2.4.1**), but also about a willingness to engage in the process. BA7 also stressed that commitment was important, and that clergy were poor at committing themselves to something that was for themselves:

"Clergy are terrible with time, starting and ending. But you know, if they are committed to these groups, it comes before anything else – funerals, or the bishop wanting to see you. So you have that interplay, "Oh, I've got a funeral!" "Well, you did make a commitment." So you are having to educate them afresh about what does it mean to be committed and to put that first... I think that is essential, and you are also helping them to realise that this is not a day off. Some of them will go, 'oh, it's my day off!' This is work." (BA7).

#### **5.2.4.7 Subordinate theme 4.7: Being sent**

Echoing **section 5.2.1.4**, being 'sent' was identified as a hindering factor:

"They were sent and they found it quite difficult to engage with the group process. There was always a funeral or something else that meant that *unfortunately* they were unable to come, so we never got, only twice I think in a year, the cohorts, all cohort of

five and they were very defensive and things were very 'out-there' and it was hard work" (BA3).

BA3 mentioned that some people were there simply to comply:

"I think it is because they were the sort of people who did what the bishop's said, because that's what you do, but you don't go any further. You are there and that's it, so... Any question of looking more deeply at what might be going on, and what internal drivers there might be, or of helping others to explore where they might be, that wasn't what they wanted. So, they tended to be full of bullshit!" (BA3).

Again, the importance of this being a voluntary activity is highlighted. This raises an issue about the value of making such groups mandatory in ordination training.

#### **5.2.4.8 Subordinate theme 4.8: Poor facilitation**

BA3 mentioned the need to have good facilitation:

"If you can't find the money to facilitate well, that's not going to be helpful. If you don't have a facilitator, you run the risk of it becoming a collusive, or moan, shop, but that doesn't mean it's not a good idea; it just means that it's not a panacea and it's got to be very carefully constructed and reviewed really... When you've got the right facilitator, that can be identified, looked at, challenged, but if there is nobody there to make those connections, and those connections are not made, then they haven't learned very much, have they really?... except that they hate groups" (BA3).

Good external facilitation seems important in keeping the group engaged in process.

#### **5.2.4.9 Subordinate theme 4.9: Not for everyone**

BA3 felt that it was important to recognise that reflexive groups weren't for everyone:

"I suppose I puzzle about ..... I know of a young – youngish – 50s, newly ordained priest who has been in his first parish for three years now. He was very resistant to cell groups; joined one, very happy to listen, never wanted to say anything himself and when he was persuaded to, always, always talked about achievement and what he was doing – never about how he felt or anything that was really pertinent; and he was invited, because we set up a group for new incumbents because they were a group of people with stuff in common and often feel isolated and without support. It was a good idea to have a

group. It wasn't compulsory. It was just there – an invitation, and he came and talked to me about this, and was incandescent with rage that he should be expected to waste time doing this when life was so busy. Why would he need a group? He already – he'd been dealing with stuff for a long time, so there was nothing he needed to know about things. I said, "I don't think it's that sort of group. I don't think it's to do with getting to know XXX. I think it's to do with them supporting each other and reflecting on practice". "Well, I can't be bothered with that sort of rubbish....." and there are always going to be people like that, and they are often the ones that undermine the efficacy of the group. So, in a sense, it would be good to find something else for them. But on the other hand, they may just learn something but one doesn't want them to wreck it for everybody else. I think you need a mixed economy. I don't think there's all one blanket, and I, from counselling training and training counsellors, I know that quite a lot of people did not find their personal development groups helpful and I didn't find my own helpful. So, I – I mean I did learn something but it wasn't, it didn't merit the time that it took me to learn it. I think so much depends on really good facilitators and the right combination of people" (BA3).

#### **5.2.4.10 Subordinate theme 4.10: Struggles with expectation**

BA6 felt that part of the cultural struggle of participation involved the difference in expectation required of group participants:

"It gets caught up in a bigger picture of authority. It seems to me to be something about the nature of the Church, that whenever they think the kind of "Bishop Daddy" wants you to do it, it becomes, 'Oh ah THEY are making me', or 'THEY think I should do this'. Or, if you are an ordinand, it is likely to be, 'IF I don't do this, THEY won't ordain me'" (BA6).

BA6 felt that sometimes alternative ways of being are demonstrated by those in authority, but that many people found forms of authenticity difficult to assimilate, and BA6 felt that this difficulty can add to the struggle to participate in a reflexive group:

"When the diocesan Bishop came and spoke recently to the second cohort [of an AMD group], he was using visual images to talk about incompleteness, and unfinished-ness, and was talking about this was a place that the Church is in - in a stage of transition - and some of them afterwards thought he was ill, and they were concerned about his health. In fact, there wasn't anything at all wrong with him, but because they couldn't assimilate

his emotional authenticity which sounds bizarre... So, the fact that he was being genuine was unusual. Bishops are supposed to tell us what to do, and then we are supposed to either think that's great, or rebel against him. A lot of them just spend their entire time in rebellion. It challenges this notion that the leadership... or opens up the possibility of collegiality as being trustworthy" (BA6).

There seems to be an issue highlighted here about the clash of values espoused within the body-politic of the CofE, which can prevent clergy from being able to engage with vulnerability.

#### **5.2.4.11 Subordinate theme 4.11: Distance**

Some Dioceses are widespread, and several BAs felt that travelling a distance was prohibitive for some, although beneficial for others:

"The trouble is XXXX is XXXX and XXXX – it's a mega-area. You've got XXXX and then you have the countryside, so it's scattered, two hours' drive away. So, you do have people who might be travelling ten minutes from here and then you would certainly have people travelling an hour away from here. But actually those who find it beneficial will often say, "I like that. I thought it would be a pain but I find that really helpful." That's where the reflection is going on. Why did I share what I shared? Why did I get emotional? And it's creating that self-reflection which is, I think, really essential" (BA7).

### **5.2.5 Superordinate Theme 3: Theological understanding**

BA6 felt that if reflexive groups were to become a more accepted part of ordination training, then it was necessary to find a theology for them:

"Clergy... find the idea of a personal development group in the way that you go to counselling training - you ideally know it is on the cards, and you accept it because you see it as having a direct relationship to your training and to your skills. They find that idea deeply threatening, and also because it's not necessarily wrapped up in theology. If you wrap it up in theology, it might be slightly more palatable to them" (BA6).

This subsection presents an analysis of the ways that the BAs understood the groups theologically. However, it is important to preface this section by stating that, as researcher, I noticed that thinking theologically about their groups was something that the BAs largely struggled to do. They seemed to place a greater emphasis on the practical and psychological use of such groups, than on their theological underpinnings. The themes below will be discussed more fully in Chapter Five.

#### **5.2.5.1 Subordinate theme 5.1: Relational nature of God**

BA5 suggested that such groups reflected the relational nature of God.

“Just a kind of theological comment as it were on what groups are doing is that I feel, in the end, that at best they are reflecting the relational nature of God and I think that is quite important and I take that kind of thinking from Barth - that sort of Trinitarian understanding, sort of relationality of God, and say that we are called to do that; and that that kind of depth of relating in a group mirrors that in some way, and I think that is important” (BA5).

#### **5.2.5.2 Subordinate theme 5.2: Reflects journey of the disciples**

BA5 reflected that:

“It makes me think about the disciples and their own journey that had to both be an inward one and an outward one when they were with Jesus, as it were... The group, in a sense, represented something about coming to a resource and taking something, and then going out, and it being worked out in practice, and so that was sort of a way of reflecting on the group” (BA5).

#### **5.2.5.3 Subordinate theme 5.3: Running the race**

BA5 regarded the group as being an enabling space to enable participants to ‘run the race’:

“This is another way of addressing self-care and sustaining yourself in the ministry. It may be an option for people, under the banner of, ‘where do you get the support you need to sustain you in ministry?’, to run the race. It’s a marathon. Where do you get the support that you need so that you can have time out to reflect. Am I sustained sufficiently? Often issues might come up about, ‘I’m too busy. I haven’t time to stop, you know. I haven’t a prayer life’. So, if that’s happening, what’s stopping them? So, the group will support each other in that in terms of that useful phrase to reflect and stop when the rest of the time they are just running” (BA5).

#### **5.2.5.4 Subordinate theme 5.4: Love thy neighbour as thyself**

BA4 considered that theologically, the group could be regarded as a place ‘set apart’ – and as a way of loving your neighbour as you love yourself, in that you have to love yourself before you can love your neighbour.

“So in theological terms, it could be something around the fact that Jesus took himself away from the crowds – the sort of ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. Ministers are very good at attending to others, but not as good at looking after themselves; and it is this thing about, ‘is it selfish?’. ‘Is it self-indulgent?’ And self-care doesn’t mean self-denial? So around that, Jesus took time out to look after himself, to go to set aside time to pray, to be alone, to be with his disciples... If you’ve got nothing left to take up your cross with; if you are completely spent, if you are burnt out, then you’ve got nothing left. Nothing left to give to follow Jesus with. You know, recognising our humanness and our limits, and I don’t believe that Jesus meant us to be so depleted and so burnt out that, well, we can’t have a ministry if it’s so burnt out, depleted. There’s nothing left to give and ministry is very much about giving. But if you are not giving to yourself, you’ve nothing left to give to others. And that’s the danger with clergy that are burnt out, and they just work harder but producing less, which is a great sadness, and when they say, “I haven’t a prayer life. I’m too busy”, there’s something really wrong there” (BA4).

BA3 also followed this strand of theology, but placed the emphasis on the group being a place where we learn to love our neighbour:

“That ‘love your neighbour / love one another’ thing which is the ultimate challenge; but the group can, when it works well, as long as it’s not cosily collusive, actually manifest; a non-sentimental love – tough love” (BA3).

#### **5.2.5.5 Subordinate theme 5.5: Vulnerability**

BA3 spoke about the theology of vulnerability that can be reflected in learning to be vulnerable in a group:

“It’s an experience of being vulnerable, and if you are going to go into ministry and you are going to be proclaiming a theology, which, after all, is based on vulnerability - because you can’t get much more vulnerable than the baby born out of wedlock and made a refugee, etc., or the broken body on the cross. So, your theology is based on vulnerability and strength through vulnerability. It is absolutely no good at all to be immune from experiencing your own vulnerability and defended against it, because how can you possibly walk alongside someone who is?” (BA3).

#### **5.2.5.6 Subordinate theme 5.6: Body of Christ**

BA3 made links with Corinthians in stating:

“We are the body of Christ, so a group seems to be a particularly good way of expressing that and of recognising the different gifts and the different parts - the way the different parts of the body interact with each other and support each other” (BA3).

#### **5.2.5.7 Subordinate theme 5.7: Incarnation**

BA3 reflected on the incarnational nature of reflexive groups:

“It is an incarnational theology. There are incarnational things that are being done. It’s a balance against the training becoming too cerebral... That actually we are in ministry, and ministry is to do with supporting people, and understanding people, and enabling people, and helping them grow. And we are looking for Christ in them, and they are hopefully finding Christ in us, and the Spirit is working between us, and that’s incarnational. If you spend too much time theologising and doing all sorts of really important biblical work which will make your sermons amazing, etc., but you don’t do the other work which enables you to understand people, and how to make connections with them, it won’t come to very much. I think also these groups do provide people with a lot of challenge and how they deal with challenge. People who want there to be – the sort of people who say at the beginning of the group, ‘What’s the purpose of this group, and what are its aims and objectives? How will we know when they’ve been achieved?’ and all that sort of thing. The open-ended indefinable, intangible benefits are really difficult for them to work with, and yet that is the nature of so much of what we do. And so that’s quite a good lesson, and also I think there’s a huge sense of failure very often. “This is no good. I am no good. I’m not the sort of person to do this. I’m not as good as they are”; and all those insecurities that come up especially more in a group where people listen to each other and think, “help, I’m not like that. I can’t do it”. That should enable, if it’s properly facilitated and people are safe enough, to express some of that. That should enable an exploration of failure in a non-cerebral way, and it seems to me that that’s happily at the root of our Christian theology too. The cross is the ultimate failure, isn’t it, in terms of normal human experience and understanding, and yet it’s on that, that redemption is based. So, you know, there all sorts of possible theological spin-offs” (BA3).

#### **5.2.5.8 Subordinate theme 5.8: Trinitarian**

BA6 recognised the group as holding diversity in unity, as happens in families, as happened in the early Church, and as currently happens in Church life today:

“Talking about the Church becoming a movement, and what I kind of thought was small groups which are in a sense familial, but in the terms of the early Christian community or the discipleship community are alternative family, and they are family with difference, aren’t they? They are a drawing together of diversity which leads to a union that is familial. That enables really complicated human processes, probably from desire to competition, to anger, to betrayal, which feels, when you talk about it like that, very much like a therapy group. I’m not suggesting the disciples were in fact a therapy group, but there was a containing space for that, and to me, that is also something Trinitarian going on in that, and engaging with kind of parallel dynamics” (BA6).

BA7 also echoed this theme:

“That’s how it is to me - very Trinitarian. God’s endless open creativity. I suppose my theology is that I don’t believe God wastes anything - fatherly concept - very open for self-discovery, so that’s God and the Holy Spirit at work, you could say. Revealing that which is before. It certainly conveys a sense of, ‘I’m not just an individual’. You know, I’ve become a clergyman and this places a huge mantle on me when I get ordained or when I get my first parish. A huge core gets dumped on me – responsibility - and everybody clears off the next day. This is how it may make clergy feel, isolated and alone. But I think we are trying to mirror, you know, you are not alone. You are part of the Body, and this is one place where you might feel the benefit of being part of that Body” (BA7).

#### **5.2.5.9 Subordinate theme 5.9: Becoming**

BA6 identified the group as a place to grow into the fullness of Christ (to become):

“I’m thinking also of the stuff that Michael Jacobs did – he wrote a book a long time ago called, ‘Into the Fullness of Christ’. What you are hoping is that people become what they are intended ‘to be’. There is something about growing up here, into a sort of maturity. I did Person-Centred training in the large part, but if you genuinely believe it, Him becoming a person, if you believed it, Christ wants the person... God wants the person to flourish. You have to trust in that kind of dynamic energy which as a Christian, I could associate with God’s presence, or energy, or active spirit, in the world... to be in that process, and to not contain it; but that it – I don’t know how to put it – that it is ‘present’ in there. When Rogers talks about the actualising tendency, I’ve always found it’s tended to make that mark over ... and to wonder about the actualising tendency, you know. Is it that kind of biological thing? I don’t think that it is. It’s something else and...



That sense of becoming... and there's a trust in that. Otherwise you'd think, well, this experience of brokenness, or this experience of breaking down. You wouldn't think it was going to be (swopping models) some form of individuation process if you didn't trust that was a potential possibility" (BA6).

#### **5.2.5.10 Subordinate theme 5.10: Eucharistic living**

BA1 spoke about how the ritual/culture of groups mirrored a liturgical paradigm, which led to a redemptive activity:

"Well, supposing they were part of 'Eucharistic living'. Supposing they were worship groups, really in that sense. Supposing it was doxological, you know, that celebrated diversity and were aware of the potential for spiritual growth in the form - supposing they were liturgical that had its ritual, it's exchange .... with its contract and its boundaries and its ..... and therefore is a container for discovering more about the divine through the unconscious. I think that's the access point for me. For me, I'm absolutely appalled, well not withstanding whether you accept the unconscious and all that sort of stuff, whatever you call it. It just seems to be me to be extraordinary spirituality that everyone craves, and the unconscious mind somehow some sort of dialogue going on. In that sort of format of the group and, say its time boundaries, its layout, its stages in the group – of course, they all have stages, and moments. So, I think for me it would be about that sort of understanding of God. Whether you would get any of the doctrines of God out of it, you know whether they are redemptions, experiences of creation and incarnation, resurrection, all these modes of understanding God's activity in human encounter – they may be quite intensively felt. And if people could feel a massive release that they didn't have to carry the burden of penal substitution, that they could really discover representation, you know they could do things on behalf of other people rather than instead of, you know, because this awful thing which bedevils ministry, for laity as well as clergy of doing it 'instead of' other people, rather than 'on behalf of', which of course, to me is the redemptive act. Christ died for our sins means on behalf of us, not instead of us, you know which is so dreadful, so unfashionable now" (BA1).

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter has presented the analysis of the data from the Bishops' Advisors. The data from the TEIs contrast with the experiences and opinions of the Bishops' Advisors for Pastoral Care and Counselling, who facilitate reflexive groups to support clergy, and who wish that clergy were better

able to be reflexive. The data from the BAs suggest that that inability to be more reflexive seems to go back to their selection and training. The benefits and difficulties, for Clergy, of reflexive groups, have been elaborated in the data, as have ways of thinking theologically about the purpose of reflexive groups. In the next chapter, the analysis of the data from the perspectives of reflective groups' participants will be presented.

## Stage Two: *Cultural/Contextual*:

### Chapter 6: Findings: Phase Three.

This chapter presents the data from the online survey of the participants from two types of SRG-type groups that were identified by the Bishops' Advisors - Reflective Practice Groups (see **section 5.2.2.8**) and Peer Groups (see **section 5.2.2.6**) which are facilitated in three dioceses. In this chapter, they will be collectively referred to as 'Reflexive Groups (RG)' for the purposes of collating this data. It was not the purpose of the survey to compare and contrast both types of groups, but instead to seek the participants' experiences of taking part in an SRG-type group in order to ascertain the groups' value and limitations from the participants' perspectives; to see, given their experience, if the participants felt that RGs had a place in ordination training; and to understand how the participants made theological sense of their experience. The survey data from the RG participants is presented along with some initial commentary.

#### 6.1 Statistical data of participants' experiences of RGs from the online survey

Table 3 describes the data collected from the online surveys in Dioceses 1, 2 & 3 ([D1 response rate 55.2%; n=16]; [D2 response rate 87.5%; n=7] & [D3 response rate 51.8%; n=14]).

##### 6.1.1 Initial commentary on the statistical data on benefit

The data reveal that the majority of participants from all of the dioceses found the RGs beneficial in helping them to: feel supported, feel less isolated, gain insight and awareness, have better self-care, gain personal growth, experience vulnerability safely and negotiate boundaries in ministry better. There is some difference in the data around the ability of RGs to enable difference to be respected better (D1= 87.5% & D3= 92.9%, *but* D2= 28.6%). There is some uncertainty expressed in D2 about the group's effectiveness in enabling an improved quality of pastoral encounter (D1= 81.2% & D3= 92.9, *but* D2= 57.1%), and yet there is a clear benefit in enabling the interaction with others to be better (D1=75%, D2= 71.4% & D3= 92.9%). There is also uncertainty expressed about the group's ability to enable trust in others to grow (D1= 62.5 & D3= 71.4%, *but* D2= 50%). Perhaps most surprising, given the non-theological nature of the groups, is the data that indicates theological growth (D1= 62.5%, D2= 71.4% & D3= 66.7%). These results indicate the nature of the value of RGs to most participants who responded to the survey.

No.	Statement: <i>My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to:</i>	Diocese 1		Diocese 1		Diocese 2		Diocese 2		Diocese 3		Diocese 3	
		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
		%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=
1.	Feel supported	93.3	14	6.7	1	100	7	0	0	100	14	0	0
2.	Feel less isolated in my ministry	93.8	15	6.3	1	100	7	0	0	100	14	0	0
3.	Gain insight into the way I think	93.8	15	6.3	1	100	7	0	0	100	14	0	0
4.	Gain insight into my way of being in the world	75	12	25	4	85.7	6	14.3	1	92.9	13	7.1	1
5.	Gain awareness of how I impact on others	87.5	14	12.5	2	85.7	6	14.3	1	100	13	0	0
6.	Respect difference better	87.5	14	12.5	2	28.6	2	71.4	5	92.9	13	7.1	1
7.	Have a better sense of self-care	81.3	13	18.8	3	83.3	5	16.7	1	92.9	13	7.1	1
8.	Have a better quality of pastoral encounter with others in my ministry	81.2	13	18.8	3	57.1	4	42.9	3	92.9	13	7.1	1
9.	Grow theologically	62.5	10	37.5	6	71.4	5	28.6	2	66.7	8	33.3	4
10.	Interact better with others in my ministry	75	12	25	4	71.4	5	28.6	2	92.9	13	7.1	1
11.	Grow as a human being	75	12	25	4	100	7	0	0	100	14	0	0
12.	Trust others more	62.5	10	37.5	4	50	3	50	3	71.4	10	28.6	4
13.	Experience my own vulnerability safely	87.5	14	12.5	2	100	7	0	0	100	14	0	0
14.	Negotiate boundaries better in my ministry	68.8	11	31.2	5	71.4	5	28.6	2	84.6	11	15.4	2
<b>Table 3. Collated statistical data from the online surveys of Diocese 1, 2 and 3.</b>													
No.	Statement: <i>I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by:</i>	Diocese 1		Diocese 1		Diocese 2		Diocese 2		Diocese 3		Diocese 3	
		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
		%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=	%	n=
16.	My difficulty in committing the time to attend regularly	12.5	2	87.5	14	0	0	100	7	7.1	1	92.9	13
17.	My difficulty in sharing openly with others	12.5	2	87.5	14	14.3	1	85.7	6	0	0	100	14
18.	My difficulty in making time to prioritise attendance	12.5	2	87.5	14	0	0	100	7	7.1	1	92.9	13
19.	Others in the group	0	0	100	16	28.6	2	71.4	5	7.1	1	92.9	13
20.	The manner of facilitation	12.5	2	87.5	14	0	0	100	7	0	0	100	14
21.	The structured nature of the sessions	6.7	1	93.3	14	0	0	100	7	0	0	100	14
22.	The unstructured nature of the sessions	6.7	1	93.3	14	0	0	100	7	0	0	100	14
23.	The cost	0	0	100	16	0	0	100	7	0	0	100	13
24.	Feeling unsafe	0	0	100	15	0	0	100	7	0	0	100	14

### **6.1.2 Initial commentary on the statistical data on hindrance**

The data reveal that there is little that is hindering the experience of the groups of those who commit to the experience. Most didn't seem to have difficulty committing to the time (D1= 87.5%, D2= 100% & D3= 92.9%), and actually prioritised the time (D1= 87%, D2= 100% & D3= 92.9%). For those who are highly committed to the group (and the process of the group), the data demonstrate that sharing vulnerability with others is not problematic (D1= 87.5%, D2= 85.7% & D3= 100%), although clearly there have been struggles to share at times for some (D1= 12.5% and D2= 14.3%), with a sense of feeling held back by others at times (D2= 28.6% & D3= 7.1%) – however, this seems to be rare, with D1 reporting 100% disagreement with the statement that their involvement has been held back by others, D2 reporting a 71.4% disagreement with the same statement, and D3 reporting 92.9% disagreement. The data show that the manner of facilitation has largely been unproblematic, and has actually been helpful. The cost, likewise, has not hindered their experience (although it is not clear what each participant contributed financially to the cost of the groups, and how much this aids their commitment). All participants reported feeling 100% safe<sup>19</sup> (D1= 100%, D2= 100% & D3= 100%).

## **6.2 Qualitative data of participants' experiences of SRG-type groups from online surveys**

Each survey gave provision for participants to provide further qualitative data on four areas: Benefit; Hindrance; Thoughts on the inclusion of RGs in TEIs; and Thoughts on a theological understanding of RGs. Because the data in these areas was sparse, the data are collectively collated below from both surveys, under each theme, but attributed to each diocese with a code (e.g. D1P1= Diocese 1, Participant 1; D2P1 = Diocese 2, Participant 1; D3P1 = Diocese 3, Participant 1).

### **6.2.1 Participants' qualitative perspectives on the benefits of RGs**

Additional qualitative data from the survey regarding the benefits of the groups are in Table 4.

#### **6.2.1.1 Initial commentary on the qualitative data on benefit**

These data reveal additional areas of benefit not evident from the statistical analysis. Benefits stated are: feeling listened to and valued; learning to listen to others better; learning from others; valuing one's own ministry more; having space to think and reflect; permission to be one's self; the realisation that one is not alone in the struggles of ministry; a place to vent frustrations and express difficulties; and a place to reflect theologically and practically.

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<sup>19</sup> The word 'safe' is used here to mean 'appropriately held' and 'contained', rather than 'unchallenged'.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Code</b>
It is good to feel listened to, and thus valued, in a ministry where I spend much of my time listening to others.	D1P1
It has helped me see the value in my ministry and glimpse some of the varied ministries of those I meet with and see the challenges they have and how they approach them.	D1P2
Ability to listen better to others	D1P3
For me, one of the main benefits was having the space to think and reflect which in a busy parish role is very rare.	D1P4
Safe environment to share and listen.	D1P5
Permission to be 'me' and that it is ok to have my own self-care needs met.	D1P6
Realise I'm not alone and hear other's experiences	D2P1
It is a place to vent frustrations, hurt and anger; a place to be challenged about my attitudes and behaviour; a place to ask where is God in all of this, to reflect theologically and practically.	D2P2
It's fairly stress-free and relaxing way of spending some time. It's in the diary, so it happens!	D2P3
Having time and a safe space is so important to me.	D3P1
Hearing from others with similar experiences helps me understand that my concerns are common.	D3P2
Reflecting on similar experiences that others have.	D3P3
I would be lost without it.	D3P4
A regular safe space	D3P5

**Table 4. Participants' qualitative perspectives on the benefits of RGs**

## **6.2.2 Participants' qualitative perspectives on the hindrance factors in RGs**

Additional qualitative data from the survey regarding the hindrance factors of the groups are in Table 5.

### **6.2.2.1 Initial commentary on the qualitative data on hindrance**

The data highlight additional hindrance factors as: dual boundaries; the commitment of others in the group; the sometimes unhelpful/helpful structure/non-structure of the sessions; where a participant is in themselves; how the group 'fits' with other support structures that a participant has around

them; and wanting prayer and blessing which may be perceived as manipulative. The cost was prohibitive for one participant.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Code</b>
There is a conflict between the group and the diocesan structures. While it may work for those with only local roles, there can be a challenge where some have roles (themselves or within their families) across the diocese, which may intersect with the local roles.	D1P7
With regards to the structure, I have experienced two groups and the one in which there was a clearer structure of sharing, listening, contributing questions in turn was more beneficial. The facilitator in this group was simply that, and helped us to explore our own responses instead of offering too many responses of her own.	D1P1
None. It is one of my priorities.	D1P3
I can't really answer questions 21 & 22. There is some structure but it is quite loose, so hard to agree/disagree with these statements.	D1P8
I have been very 'talked out' at times, as I was also receiving Spiritual Direction as well as individual counselling for managing depression.	D1P6
Sometimes it has felt a bit awkward knowing the others' spouses and remembering what was said where. Sometimes people wanting to 'pray' or asking for a blessing which feels manipulative rather than positive.	D2P2
Commitment of others in the group.	D3P5
How I am on the day.	D3P7
The cost.	D3P8

**Table 5. Participants' qualitative perspectives on the hindrance factors of RGs**

### **6.2.3 Participants' perspectives on the inclusion of RGs in TEIs**

Additional qualitative data on the participants' perspectives on the inclusion of RGs in TEIs from the survey reveal a mix of views on the appropriateness of RGs in ordination training in TEIs. Difficulties related to whether sufficient trust could be experienced at that stage of training and in the context of a TEI (D1P7), and the demand that RGs may place on time and other commitments for students (D1P8, D3P4). D1P16 felt that the unstructured nature of an RG, and their lack of overt spirituality, would be unhelpful:

“...there was no spiritual aspect which is the most important part of our ministry and who we are. It was all talk and no prayer...” (D1P16).

However, several participants made mention of the helpfulness of small groups that had formed a part of their ordination training (e.g. D1P9; D1P3; D1P11; D1P8; D1P14; D1P6; D2P3; D3P1), which reflected something of the reflexive nature of RGs, but in a more structured way. Many of the participants felt that RGs in TEIs would be beneficial for the following reasons:

“What I found particularly valuable in my RPGs was learning about and reflecting upon the impact my ministry and my life in the parish impacts upon my inner life - this is something I wish I had learned earlier! All should be given the tools to act out of a place of reflection as soon as possible” (D1P1).

“It may be helpful for reflection on placements” (D1P10).

“Even in [the] teaching profession there are groups for structured conversations which provide a model for sharing experiences and listening well... So Reflective Practice Groups should be an expectation not an option” (D1P3).

“I would have welcomed the opportunity to share and reflect at a much earlier stage in my ministry” (D1P12).

“It would set a precedent of continuous, regular accountability and professional reflection” (D1P13).

“I think much heartache could be avoided if some individuals were more aware of their impact on others. Also being in ministry can be a very isolating experience so it is an excellent structure, enabling one to share confidentially with colleagues who are not part of one’s Deanery etc.” (D1P4).

“RPG's would be beneficial, for a number of reasons. Firstly, enabling the trainee minister get used to this process of self-examination and sharing. Secondly, a safe place to discuss and work through problems within their curacy. Thirdly, builds potential long term support” (D1P5).



“...such a group would have then remained a support going forward” (D2P4).

“Curacies can be very lonely places with some difficult incumbents” (D2P1).

“...it would model good practice to the student which could be carried on into ordained ministry. Thinking reflectively is often not part of ordination training but it is vital for flourishing in ministry” (D2P2).

“It would be good to start the practice of sharing with others in a safe space early in ministry. The challenges of training are equally demanding to the challenges of ministry” (D3P2).

“Should be an essential part of formation” (D3P9).

The data from the participants indicate that the value of RGs in TEIs is greater than the drawbacks. The lack of overt spirituality was a concern for one participant.

#### **6.2.4 Participants’ perspectives on the theological understanding of RGs**

An IPA analysis of the additional qualitative data from the survey regarding the participants’ perspectives on theological understanding of RGs, reveals six broad theological themes: growth to fullness; love yourself and your neighbour; God’s creation; the centrality of God; participating in the mission of God as Disciples; and community with God.

##### **6.2.4.1 Growth to fullness**

Four participants expressed different ways in which RGs enable participants to become the person that God intended them to be:

“The honest reflection allows you to develop as an individual to grow to fullness of life” (D1P10).

“It enabled me to reflect on the outworking of my faith and the opportunity to reflect on who I am, and my gifts and faults, was both a humbling and liberating experience. I felt it helped me to be a more grounded, whole, real person” (D1P4).

“That entails bringing more of myself into the light, being more conscious, about discovering the image of God in which I am created - and enabling that true me to live” (D2P12).

D2P4 expressed that this growth (or becoming) was not always visible to oneself, but that the group enabled a person to see God in that process. This was echoed by D2P1:

“Allowing others to see God in you even when you can't” (D2P4).

“Realise that my God-given gifts have something to benefit others” (D2P1).

#### **6.2.4.2 Love yourself and your neighbour**

The RG enabled participants at least to begin the process of learning to love themselves, so that they were more able to love others:

“I would see it as part of our theological understanding of loving yourself and your neighbour” (D1P10).

#### **6.2.4.3 God's creation**

Reflecting on their lives as God's creation, meant that they were to be valued. The RG enables nourishment and sustenance in the valuing of that creation:

“Theologically, it has reminded me that all aspects of our lives are part of God's creating of us as unique individuals and we can be nourished and sustained in many ways” (D1P1).

#### **6.2.4.4 The centrality of God**

Several participants reflected on the need to keep the centrality of God in focus, in their lives. The RG provided the space to ‘come back to God’ or ‘refocus on the things of God’. These were expressed as:

“My ministry is strengthened when I take the time to reflect, pray, do, and review. It helps me to ensure God is at the centre of activity - not ego or number crunching!” (D1P11).

“The question at the heart of all of our ups and downs has to be where is God in all of this, in the darkness and in the light, in the blessing of new life and the nurture of families experiencing the end of life. Our calling covers the vastness of life and death and work and play and sin and forgiveness and all the other multi-faceted experiences of humankind. Somehow we are expected to encompass and process it all and find within it the heartbeat of God. This is not humanly possible but reflective practice opens new doors and windows” (D2P2).

#### **6.2.4.5 Participating in the mission of God as Disciples**

Preparing themselves, and supporting each other, to participate in God’s mission was perceived as a function of the RG. This was expressed in different ways:

“Participating in the mission of God, reflecting back to each other something of the image of God that we detect in one another (perhaps offering insights that the individual may not have been able to perceive; speaking the truth in love; offering/receiving a theology of hope and encouragement and building up; sharing one another's burdens, laying down burdens)” (D1P8).

“...“confess your sins to one another...” ; ..“bear one another's burdens..” ; “...telling the truth in love...” ; “.. Let each one think of themselves with sober judgement...” ; I Corinthians 12 ; Hebrews 10: 23 - 25 etc.” (D1P13).

“We are all disciples working towards one common purpose. But with a need to support one another through the work we are called to do” (D1P14).

Part of that process involved valuing difference, and the gifts of others:

“I think it mirrors something that the first disciples modelled among themselves in the early church” (D1P15).

“Theologically it enhanced my recognition of the role of female priest and how the Lord uses their ministry” (D1P5).

#### **6.2.4.6 Community with, and of, God**

Finally, the intrinsic need for community with, and of, God was recognised:

“Humanity has been created for community with God and others, and these groups remind us that we are not lonely individuals but part of a greater whole” (D2P6).

“Being held in a loving, non-judgmental space and looking at potentially difficult situations through different lenses allowing light and clarity to come in and transform my behaviour” (D3P3).

D1P3 simply, and succinctly, expressed it as ‘trinitarian’.

### **6.3 Summary**

This chapter has presented the data (and, to some extent, the voices) of the participants. Whilst the online survey method has arguably not revealed the same richness of data, as the focus groups may have, it nevertheless has given opportunity for those who have experienced RGs to ‘speak to’ their experiencing. The data reveal the value of RGs, and contain reflection on the theological validation of RGs, and their appropriateness in TEIs during ordination training. Chapter 7 will integrate and critique the literature and data, and attempt a theological reflection on Spiritually Reflexive Groups.

## Stage Three: *Theological*

### Chapter 7: Discussion

The research question that underpins this Thesis is: *Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?* The aims of the research are:

- To explore if, and how, reflexivity is developed in clergy training;
- To explore if, and in what way(s) [if any], SRGs might support and build up the ministry of the Church;
- To examine how SRGs might be understood theologically, psychologically and relationally.

This chapter integrates and critiques the data and the literature, in an attempt to answer the research question and meet the aims. The chapter will explore the benefit of utilising Spiritually Reflexive Groups in clergy training and in supporting ministry, and examine the theology of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in clergy training and in supporting clergy in ministry.

#### **7.1 Assessing the benefit of use of spiritually reflexive groups in ordination training**

As stated in Gubi (in press), whilst RPGs and PDGs are not the only methods of facilitating self-awareness and reflexivity (McLeod and McLeod, 2014; Johns, 2012; Nash and Nash, 2009), the literature suggests that they enable core assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes to be made visible to the person because of the group interaction. These colour our interactions and relationships with other people, our perceptions and feelings about the world and the meaning of life (Johns, 2012). Within a spiritual formation context, Fowler's 'Stages of Faith' (1981), although they can be criticised as being 'hierarchical' (Goss and Gubi, 2015; Mabry, 2006), demonstrate the need for a place where an ordinand, or newly ordained person, can feel held and supported, as one moves from a more unquestioned acceptance of faith into a deeper mysticism of faith which is characterised by uncertainty, as reflexivity and faith develop. SRGs and PDGs can provide a space where assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes can be fully revealed and tested in comparison with others' attitudes, through gaining responses and feedback from other people, and from seeing and feeling how behaviour, which is driven by our values, directly affects and is perceived by other members of our world (Gubi and Korris, 2015; McLeod and McLeod, 2014; Johns, 2012; Rose, 2008; 2012; Barrett, 2010; Payne, 1999). However, they only sometimes lead to positive outcomes (Williams and Irving, 1996, p.166) and can sometimes be destructive (Lieberman, 1981, p.241) and

dysfunctional (Lennie, 2000). Benson (1987) observes these 'negatives' as: feeling excluded or scapegoated; suffering the insensitivities, righteous, relevant or inappropriate anger and clumsiness of others; feeling unsafe and uncontained, over-dependent on or hostile to peers or group leaders; feeling bored, frustrated, impotent or critical of self and /or others – all of which can occur for group participants at any time. Moon (2004, p.134) states that not all learners find reflexivity easy, and Robson and Robson (2009) argue that the need to feel 'safe' is important, and such groups don't always feel safe. These aspects of difficulty were largely recognised in the data from the BAs (see **section 5.2.4**), but Bonhoeffer (1954/2015) argues the value of experiencing difficulty in community. 'For this cause, [Christ] had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So, the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life, but in the thick of foes' (p.7).

Much has been written about the value and process of groups in the psychological literature (e.g. Preston-Shoot, 2007; Jaques and Salaman, 2006; Brown, 2000; Corey, 2000; Yalom, 1995), and they are valued as a means of developing self-awareness (Johns, 2012; Mearns, 1997). Johns (2012, p.157) states that being in a PDG<sup>20</sup> can:

- '[enable] experience in interactions with other people in very concrete and immediate ways, which can reinforce effective interpersonal patterns, challenge unhelpful ones and allow for possible changes to be tested out;
- reduce loneliness and isolation belonging to age and stage, life space or existential uncertainties by providing a supportive, bonded, at times loving, connection with peers being shared, purposeful activity;
- provide opportunities to see and feel the consequences of our projections of others;
- offer, in other group members, a range of alternative models of being, behaving and communicating which may assist in us loosening or even changing some of our own constructs and straitjackets in feeling, thinking and acting.'

Dryden et al. (1995) regard the PDG as a vibrant context for identifying personal development needs. If an atmosphere of trust and spirit of encounter can be developed in a group, the members can help each other identify needs which might otherwise have been blind-spots. Lennie (2007) points out that the participants of PDGs<sup>20</sup> share relationships in other spheres which may impact on how an individual communicates within the group, and whether they get to know others in a meaningful way or remain hidden within the group.

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<sup>20</sup> The same is applicable to a SRG.

Within the American Catholic Church, small groups are used in ordination training to cultivate spirituality (Foster et al., 2006) - their purpose being declared as 'the creation of a space in a busy calendar to tend to students' spiritual growth, and to centre the spiritual life of the seminary community thus contributing to the students' spiritual development' (p. 281); although it is unclear from the literature if they are SRGs as defined above, as no uniform practices in the use of small groups to foster students' spiritual formation was found in Foster et al.'s (2006) research.

Harkness (2012) argues for methods (pedagogy) that enable a '*deep learning*' in ordination formation which involves fostering the ability for the critical analysis of ideas and the ability to link them to already known concepts and principles, which leads to understanding and long-term retention of concepts so that they can be used for problem-solving in unfamiliar contexts. This is in contrast to 'surface learning' which is 'the tacit acceptance of information and memorisation as isolated and unlinked facts' (p. 143). Reiss (2013) indicates that 'surface learning' has largely characterised training for ministry in the CofE for many years, as ordinands come to terms with biblical knowledge, systematic theology and canon law. However, the formation criteria for ordinands has moved towards developing a greater ability to be reflexive (The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, 2003; Church of England, 2014), and towards lifelong learning in ministerial education (Ward, 2005). So, the pedagogy within TEIs needs to change (and is changing) to accommodate these formation requirements. The literature and the data from this research suggests that this shift in pedagogy, with the use of SRGs, will enable '*deep learning*' (Rhymes, 1993; Harkness, 2012). To that end, Ladd (2014) has argued for a more embodied approach to ministerial development that involves implementing community (or 'reflective hubs' of 6-8 students) in which spiritual discernment can happen, 'that enable theological reflection in context to be the heart of ministerial training with genuine attention to what it takes to form community that attends to people's subjectivity, and which is at home in building relationship with the stranger... and encourages reflective learning and development as a norm for ministers and congregations alike' (p. 363). The use of SRGs, like the Moravian concept of *Banden*, as a form of pedagogy, to enable Ladd's (2014) embodied approach to ministerial formation, and Harkness's (2012) '*deep learning*', seems a possible way forward.

The data from BA1, BA2 and B6 indicate that at one time, work-based learning groups (see **section 5.2.2.3** and **section 5.2.2.7**) formed part of ordination training in the CofE in the 1960s and 1970s, and were found by the BAs who underwent them to be tremendously helpful in their clergy training experience. However, these work-based learning groups seem to have ceased in the same format in more recent years, as far as this research can tell. The data from the TEIs, in Chapter 4, indicate that other forms of group work are now utilised in TEIs. This may be due to changes in

curriculum expectations, or leadership in TEIs, but the data from the BAs indicate (from their perspective) that TEIs still do not develop clergy with an adequate level of personal development, self-awareness and self-care (see **section 5.2.1.5**) to fit them properly for ministry. This perception, formed from their experience of working with curates and clergy, comes across very powerfully in the data. Indeed, one of the strongest expressions of this is from BA6 who is also a Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) – the person who is responsible for the training of curates (post-ordination training) in his/her diocese.

As stated in Gubi (in press), the literature and the data indicate the need for reflexivity in training for ministry, as developing reflexivity and self-awareness are necessary pre-requisites to good preaching (Long, 2004; Craddock, 2002; Day, 1998; Schlafer, 1992; Buechner, 1977). Developing reflexivity and self-awareness are also pre-requisites to good pastoral care of others, where the 'self' is the resource for spiritual and pastoral care (Kelly, 2012; Lyall, 2001; 2009; Willows and Swinton, 2000; Nouwen, 1979). Awareness of self enables self-care against burnout (Burton and Burton, 2009; Lee and Horsman, 2002) and helps to build relational qualities that are needed in pastoral care (Kelly, 2012; Lyall, 2001). Good 'praxis' in pastoral theology is aided by reflexivity (Forrester, 2000), and reflexivity is necessary in using pastoral supervision effectively (Paterson and Rose, 2014; Leach and Paterson, 2010). There is some recognition 'that a deepening self-awareness and development of interpersonal skills, enabling co-operative styles of working with volunteers and a truly collaborative leadership style, as well as the ability to handle both conflict and isolation, and the confidence to seek out and develop appropriate support networks', are all qualities required for Missional Leadership (Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway, 2012, p.10). Reflexivity is also needed in facilitating 'small group ministry' leadership (Donahue, 2012; Jung, 2011; Gladen, 2011; Comiskey, 2010; Lewis, 2005; Atkinson, 2002; 2006; Gorman, 2002). Sims (2011) offers one method (or model) for achieving the development of reflexive theology and practice (which has been added to by me to heighten the aspect of reflexivity) [see **Figure 2** in **Chapter 2**]. Kelly (2013) offers another approach to developing spiritual reflexivity, which is conducted in a small group context, and which has been evaluated as successful (see **Chapter 2**) in a chaplaincy context. This approach could also be appropriate for a TEI context, but there is no evidence to demonstrate its success in that context. Ladd (2014), too, has offered another approach, albeit within the context of pastoral supervision, but which could be translated into a SRG experience (see **Chapter 2**).

It is clear from the TEI data (see **Chapter 4**), that reflective practice is becoming more embedded in the curriculum, and that reflective practice-type groups exist in some TEIs – although it is not clear from the response rate in Phase One of this research, just how widespread this practice is. Five groups identified in the data are: *Action Reflection Groups* (see **section 4.2.1**), *Open Space*



*Groups* (see **section 4.2.2**), *Discipleship Groups* (see **section 4.2.3**), *Formation Groups* (see **section 4.2.4**) and *Reflective Practice Groups* (see **section 4.2.5**). Although the opportunity to see these groups in action has not been possible during this research, due to the difficulties in getting permission (from TEI principals, group facilitators and participants), the descriptions provided by the TEIs nonetheless enable some tentative evaluation of the group experience to be made against the definition of a SRG<sup>21</sup>. Examined through the lens of a SRG<sup>22</sup>, the *Action Reflection Groups*, whilst supportive and enabling habits of lifelong learning to be gained, appear rather structured and agenda-led; *Open Space Groups*, whilst fostering listening skills and developing the ability to share and receive, appear to be so highly structured as to leave very little time for depth of facilitation of students' process; *Discipleship Groups*, whilst small and offering opportunity for safe reflection, seem to blur the boundary between socialising, prayer, companionship and service, and can be in danger of becoming a more social and collusive space. The description of *Formation Groups* is limited, but their infrequency of meeting seems to preclude the depth of relationship being formed that is needed for trust to build that enables honest reflection; and the *Reflective Practice Groups*, although small in size, seem structured, with the inclusion of lectures at times. All of these groups appear to be tutor-led, or tutor-facilitated, which potentially establishes a difficult dynamic within the participants of being able to express honest reflection, whilst knowing that they are being formally assessed (implicitly, if not explicitly), making the spaces potentially 'measured' in terms of what can be shared – 'will they ordain me if I express my doubts of faith?' In counsellor training contexts, PDGs are usually facilitated by external facilitators who have no assessment role, for this reason, thereby enabling a more honest and open reflection (Johns, 2012; Rose, 2008; Lennie, 2007).

In my experience of working in Higher Education Institutions, there is always pressure to cover an extensive curriculum in a finite period of time, which is measured against learning outcomes. Ixer's (1999; 2010) main objection to reflective practice is that, in his view, reflectivity cannot be measured objectively – although a person's sense of their own growth and development (psychologically and theologically) can be expressed subjectively, with the inner journey and thinking demonstrated through journaling and written assignments (Bolton, 2014). Many TEIs run a mixed mode of attendance (full-time and part-time), with some being residential courses and some being non-residential. TEIs have had to develop a flexible approach to ordination training to accommodate an increase in those who are intending to serve in non-stipendiary ministry (or localised unpaid ministry) who also work full-time whilst training (Reiss, 2013). Therefore, the argument can be convincingly made, that to include a SRG on a regular basis, is to seemingly have to accommodate

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<sup>21</sup> See **Section 0.1** for the definition of a SRG.

<sup>22</sup> This process of critical reflection in relation to the definition of SRGs is not intended to devalue these groups to their participants nor the training received in the TEIs.

another 'something' in an already tight schedule of material to cover. However, arguably, SRGs can enable a 'letting go' of some of the more formal approaches to learning through 'input' (surface learning), to enable a more informal, but bounded, space to emerge in which learning can take place from within the group, following the group's agenda for learning (Where is my/your dissonance or joy? What am I/you learning about my/yourself in this experience? Where is God in this?), i.e. Ladd's (2014) 'embodied approach':

"... [where] the deepest expressions of humanity can be made and received, to experience at those times a sense of what might be called 'the beyond in our midst', 'a depth of life', 'a sense of God'" (Rhymes, 1993, p. 194).

"God is there on the inside of human relating, undergirding the ways in which relatedness between self and other is carried forward without collapsing otherness into the self' (Ward, 2005, p. 95).

SRGs can also be a place where 'honest theology' can emerge. Williams (2000) states that for theology to have integrity, it must invite collaboration; and must not be, in and of itself, final.

'Language about God is kept honest in the degree to which it turns on itself in the name of God, and so surrenders itself to God: it is in this way that it becomes possible to see how it is still God that is being spoken of... Speaking of God is speaking to God and opening our speech to God's... without the tyranny of a 'total perspective' (Williams, 2000, p. 8).

The data from the BAs (see **section 5.2.1.5**) demonstrate an overwhelming support for SRGs in TEIs. BAs considered them to be a place where the seeds of self-reflection could be sown and nurtured, which could continue to be nurtured after training, as a culture of taking part in SRGs would be established (BA5). The essential nature of developing self-awareness in building self-sufficiency and resilience was highlighted (BA4), and the role of SRGs in assisting them to be developed. SRGs could enable a better culture of self-care to be established (BA4), alongside the development of a more fluid attitude to ministry and theology (BA3). Some concern was raised about the mandatory nature of SRGs in TEIs, which raised the potential of sabotage (see **section 5.2.4.7**), and there was some recognition that not everyone is suited to SRGs (see **section 5.2.1.7** and **section 5.2.4.3**), but overall the BAs considered the inclusion of SRGs in TEIs to be beneficial to

enable ordinands to ‘function with a kind of psychological literacy’ (BA6). BA6 felt that TEI principals would object to their inclusion because of the lack of explicit theological input, but BA6 also stated that ‘God might actually be at work in the psychological milieu’ (BA6). The main concern expressed by the RG participants, who were surveyed, was the lack of overt spirituality (see **section 7.2** below) and the unstructured nature of the groups (D1P16). However, the data from the participants reveal a mostly supportive response to the inclusion of SRGs in ordination training (see **section 6.2.3.1**), as a pedagogy that would enable ordinands to flourish and feel more supported in their training and ministries.

## **7.2 Assessing the value of spiritually reflexive groups in supporting ministry**

### **7.2.1 The value from the data**

It is clear from the data, that the BAs considered the main purpose of the RGs to be that of offering psychological support to clergy. This was identified in the data (both from BAs and RG participants) as offering support, enabling clergy to feel less isolated, enabling clergy to gain an insight into the way that they think and into the impact of their way of being on others. They acknowledged that the RG enabled clergy to respect difference better and to gain a better sense of self-care. The RG enabled clergy to engage in a better quality of pastoral encounter with others and to interact better with others in their ministry. The RGs were identified as enabling clergy to grow as human beings, enabling trust and vulnerability to be experienced safely. The RG was identified in the data as enabling clergy to negotiate boundaries better. There is also clear evidence in the participants’ data of the effectiveness of RGs in supporting ministry, stated as: feeling listened to and valued; learning to listen to others better; learning from others; valuing one’s own ministry more; having space to think and reflect; permission to be one’s self; the realisation that one is not alone in the struggles of ministry; a place to vent frustrations and express difficulties; and a place to reflect theologically and practically. However, this cannot be made as a universal claim of their overall effectiveness, as the research is limited to the perceptions of eight Bishops’ Advisors who arguably have an interest in validating the groups as they either organise or facilitate them, and the research is also limited to the RG participants from only three CofE dioceses, who presumably gained from participating in the RGs so as to complete the evaluation (albeit there is one dissenting voice, D1P16, which is good to have as a representation of such a voice).

This research reflects some of the benefits of RG-type groups that are demonstrated in previous research (e.g. Gubi and Korris, 2015; Francis, Robbins and Wulff, 2013; Barrett, 2010; Travis, 2008), adds to the number of benefits identified in previous research, and enhances awareness of them. Given that research indicates the impoverished psychological wellbeing of clergy

(e.g. Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Proeschold-Bell et al., 2011; Charlton et al., 2009; Chandler, 2009; Francis et al., 2005; Francis et al., 2004; Francis et al., 2000), it seems evident that enabling RGs in TEIs can help in establishing mechanisms for improving psychological wellbeing among clergy earlier in their process of formation, and for ordinands to be enculturated into prioritising a balanced attitude towards self-care and self-reflection – all of which is a beneficial thing.

### **7.2.2 The limitations from the data**

The hindrance factors to RGs were stated by the BAs as: the inability of clergy to prioritise and commit to the time; it was scary for participants to open up to their vulnerability with others; sometimes the needs of some of the participants were too big, and could sabotage the group; dual relationships with other group participants could cause complexity and hinder sharing; prayer; being sent by a Bishop or Archdeacon; the open agenda and style of facilitation doesn't suit some people; sometimes there are struggles with expectations because the RG is culturally different from other groups found in the CofE (i.e. what is this group about?); and geographically, the distance of the RG was prohibitive for some, although having to travel provided another reflective space for others. However, these limitations were not the lived experience of the RG participants (albeit they are self-selected participants who may have been predisposed *not* to have some of these problems), with only: 12.5% (D1), 0% (D2) and 7.1% (D3) finding it difficult to commit to the time; 12.5% (D1), 14.3% (D2) and 0% (D3) struggling to share openly with others; 0% (D1), 28.6% (D2) and 7.1% (D3) struggling with others in the group; 12.5% (D1) and 0% (D2 & D3) struggling with the style of facilitation; and with 0% (D1, D2 & D3) feeling unsafe. Other hindering factors expressed in the qualitative data from the RG participants (see **Table 5**) included other external factors that were 'around' for participants (e.g. D1P6 expressed feeling over-supported because of the counselling and spiritual direction that s/he was also having), and the difficulties with dual boundaries (D1P7, D2P2).

Whilst the concerns and experiences of the BAs are important things to be mindful of, and echo, to some extent, Miles and Proeschold-Bell's (2013) research, the overwhelming evidence from the RG participants in this research is that RGs are beneficial, given the limitations of the research expressed in **section 7.2.1**. Their helpfulness is also echoed in other research (e.g. Gubi and Korris, 2015; Barrett, 2010; Travis, 2008).

### **7.2.3 The spiritual adequacy of current reflective group practice from the data**

Surprisingly (given the context of the participants being clergy), the data reveal that there is a determined agenda to 'bracket off' the theological (see BA8 in **section 5.2.3.5**) in RGs, not as a way of excluding the theological (on the assumption that spirituality is already intrinsically present in a

group of clergy), but as a way of enabling participants to move from ‘head’ to ‘heart’ – from ‘intellectual discussion’ to ‘awareness of personal process’. The avoidance of the theological may also have happened as a way of avoiding ‘clashes’ of churchmanship, although arguably those of differing churchmanship have much to learn from each other, including learning to respect difference. The use of mostly non-clergy, and non-diocesan-related facilitators, may arguably have played some part in steering participants away from the spiritual - although their use as facilitators does minimise the likelihood of dual-relationships between facilitators and participants, which is also problematic; and the use of counsellors and psychotherapists to facilitate the groups may have brought in an element of the cultural suspicion of spirituality that pervades much of counselling and psychotherapy (Gubi, 2008). Yet, this bracketing off of the spiritual/theological appears neglectful of the concept of ‘heart theology’ as a valid method of theological reflection, which ‘looks to the self and the interior life as the primary space in which theological awareness is generated’ (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p.18), and is counter to Chandler’s (2009) research, which identifies ‘spiritual dryness’ as a primary predictor of emotional exhaustion in clergy. It therefore seems counter-intuitive for RGs not to assist in nurturing ‘an ongoing and renewing relationship with God, to maintain life balance, reduce stress and avoid burnout’ (Chandler, 2009, p. 284). However, there was recognition by some of the BAs that theological growth was important, and that the RGs had an important part to play in enabling that, and that perhaps the balance between the psychological and the theological/ spiritual needed to be readdressed:

“So it’s trying to enable that much more heart-led aspect of [theology]” (BA8).

“So one of the purposes of such a group would be to learn about one’s interactions with other people and how we impact on others and how they impact on us and that kind of thing. I learned everything from them - theologically funnily enough, you know. It seemed to me to be at the heart of this relational view of God, for example” (BA1).

“I think that where people relate deeply and reveal their humanity to one another, then theological growth ought to happen” (BA5).

“I think effectively it does allow that space for spiritual shifting” (BA7).

However, in enabling the shift away from intellectualised discussion to heart-led process, it seems that RGs may have side-lined (or sacrificed) a key component of support for clergy – the spiritual – or

left it for participants to assimilate the theological/spiritual for themselves, away from the RG. This approach has been criticised by some (e.g. “I found the meetings a waste of time because there was no spiritual aspect which is the most important part of our ministry and who we are” [D1P16] and “The one negative aspect of the two groups I have been in is that neither facilitator is Christian, and the discussion has thus had little spiritual content” [D1P1]), but appreciated by others (e.g. “I didn't find it ‘theologically’ reflective, but that's what I appreciated most about it” [D1P6]).

As part of this ‘bracketing’ off of the spiritual/theological, prayer was either largely non-verbal, or excluded, from the RGs (see **section 5.2.4.5**). Prayer was considered by some (e.g. BA5, BA4 and BA8) to potentially hinder the group process or to spiritualise away the difficulties faced within the group. The lack of prayer also enabled the group to be established as ‘different’ from other clergy groups and meetings (e.g. chapter meetings), which are usually begun and ended with prayer. Whilst these possibilities are things to be mindful of (Gubi, 2009), arguably the literature (e.g. Gubi, 2008) suggests that prayer can also add to a person’s sense of wellbeing, and given that Chandler’s (2009) research identifies ‘spiritual dryness’ as a primary predictor of emotional exhaustion in clergy, again this closed attitude to prayer seems counter-intuitive to the purpose of the group in promoting clergy wellbeing. However, one of the RG participants identified prayer as a hindrance to the group: “...sometimes people wanting to 'pray', or asking for a blessing, which feels manipulative rather than positive...” (D2P2). So, it seems that an attitude of mindfulness to these tensions is important (Gubi, 2009), without losing sight of the importance of the spiritual. However, if RGs are to be a place of honest theology, they must seek to be a place where religious language which claims a ‘total perspective’ on God must be avoided, and they must seek to be a place where one’s own incompleteness before God can be articulated, thereby enabling a conversation both with God, and between participants. ‘By conversing with God, it preserves conversation between human speakers... Religious practice is only preserved in any integrity by seriousness about prayer... It seeks to make sense of the practice ... before God’ (Williams, 2000, p. 13).

### **7.3 Embracing theological perspectives on spiritually reflexive groups in clergy training and in supporting clergy in ministry**

My approach to theology (and thus the lens that I bring to the data on theological understanding) is essentially one of mysticism (Gubi, 2015c, p. 13) – that we can never fully know God, and that the best we can come close to some revelation of the Divine will only ever be but a dim and shadowy image of the truth. However, I believe that theology offers some glimpse of the Divine revelation (however dim or shadowy) which is better than no glimpse – with revelation as an ongoing and emergent process, which is both divinatory/intuitive, as well as intellectual (Bennett, 2013).

In this section, potential theological insights on SRGs that emerged from the data will be explored. The insights that emerged are essentially Trinitarian (both social theorist and classical). The attempt here is not the creation of a new theology, but merely a reflection on the theological language used by the participants to make sense of their lived experiencing. Eight themes emerged which have many overlaps, but I have tried to separate them out here to make them more manageable for reflection, with the recognition that they cannot be seen as separate, but instead are merely ways of focusing on understanding aspects of where God might be in what is happening within the dynamics and purpose of SRGs (which arguably mirrors the difficulty of making theological sense of the Trinity). The themes that emerged from the data are: *Trinitarian*; *Becoming*; *Community*; *Relational nature of God*; *Incarnational*; *Vulnerability*; *Loving self and neighbour*; and *Eucharistic living*. They are reflected on in this order, as they largely flow into each other in terms of making sense.

Underpinning these themes is the theological concept of *perichoresis*. Although *perichoresis* is a theological concept found mostly in Trinitarian theology which attempts an understanding of the nature of the relationship between the ‘persons’ of the Trinity (i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and in Incarnational theology to attempt an understanding of the nature of Christ (i.e. Divine and/or Human) (Crisp, 2005), there is very much a sense that ‘mutual interpenetration’ and ‘*perichoretic unity* or *perichoretic community*’ occurs when several individuals (or individual notions) come together as *one* (e.g. one body, one purpose) – as in a SRG context. Kilby (2000) argues that this can be understood as mere projection, using language from human experience to talk about God. Whilst recognising the value of Kilby’s criticism of the inadequacy of using human language, and the reality (and danger) of projection of human experience on ‘talk about God’, language is the only instrument that humans have to articulate theology (along with art, music etc.), and relatedness to human experience is the only way of articulating meaning in a relevant way. Certainly, there is a risk that theological language is sometimes only a form of human projection onto God, and must therefore be used with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ (Bennett, 2013). However, I want to think here of the language of *perichoresis* as a way of articulating a sub-standard *mirroring* (or distortion of a *parallel process*) of the Divine relationship (Three-in-One), which can be achieved among humans who come together in relationship (as in a SRG). As humans, we carry *something of* the divine nature, so we carry *something of* that divine capacity for relationship (Schleiermacher, 1977) – with the proviso that humans are not God, and thus are not capable of achieving that same level of *perichoresis* within the ‘persons’ of the Trinity (Kilby, 2000).

In a SRG context, participants impact on each other (i.e. mutual interpenetration) and ‘shape’ each other’s thinking, and affect each other’s psychological state, attitude and behaviour;

and in a SRG context, without losing the unique character of each participant (i.e. personhood), participants 'dance' (or interact) together as one (*person-perichoretic unity*). Although this can be thought to be an abuse of *perichoresis* (Otto, 2001), this notion of mutual interpenetration underpins the following themes, with a variation of focus on what this means in terms of making theological meaning from the lived experience.

### 7.3.1 Trinitarian

The insights that Schmid (2006) provides on the Trinity are profoundly relevant for theologically understanding the transformative function of SRGs. Schmid (2006) argues that the concept of a triune God (God as communication and community) brings the dialectics of unity and plurality, identity and difference, individuality and community to a new peak of understanding of both God and human beings (p.5). Schmid (2006, pp.8-27) states that the Trinity reveals some profound truths. These include that: we are individual people in a relational structure; God is the foundation of our relationship with each other; God is 'person', and is 'group'; Community is 'unity of' and 'in difference' without mingling; God as a dancing group in love; God as 'I am who is here for you and will be with you'; God is plural (diverse, difference) yet one (mutual, collaborative); God is communication and dialogue; the human person is addressed by God to be God's image and to be included in God's community; the relationship of 'them' as 'one' is the foundation for tolerance, acceptance, dialogue, service and love; Trinity as participation, equality and plurality; Trinity provides the foundation for a valuing of one's own individuality and identity and it forbids the devaluation of other individualities and identities; Love of the one for the other overcomes the exclusion brought about by individuality; by encountering each other we acknowledge the fundamental 'we' of the Trinity; Trinity is co-operation arising out of co-existence, co-responding out of co-experiencing, co-creating out of encounter. Each of these can be seen in the way that SRGs operate as a coming together of unique individuals with experiences of journeying, to be one in a community of self-exploration and Divine revelation, which Fiddes (2000) argues enables 'participating in God'. Fiddes (p.47) suggests that this sense of relational unity is based on the idea of *perichoresis*. 'By virtue of their eternal love, they [the divine persons] live in one another to such an extent, and dwell in one another to such an extent, that they are one' (Moltmann, 1981)<sup>23</sup>. Although Volf (1998) argues that this kind of mutual interiority is not possible for humans, this sense of social Trinitarian theology (Moltmann, 1981; McDougall, 2005) does provide useful insights that echo the

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<sup>23</sup> Moltmann (1981, p.175-175) suggests that this concept signifies a unity or at-oneness that is constantly created anew through acts of self-giving and receiving among three persons. This is emulated in the relational dynamic present among the participants in Spiritually Reflexive Groups.



attitudes and characteristics that SRGs must embody in their enabling of each participant. Zizioulas (1985) picks up on this theological perspective by suggesting that community (and therefore SRGs) can be a place where 'logos' (truth, word) can be revealed through encounter. 'Revelation always unifies existence, through an idea, or a meaning, that is singular and comprehensive, forming a connection between created and uncreated rationality' (p.77). Awad (2010) argues that the foundations of Zizioulas' ecclesiological anthropology stem from this identification of 'person' and 'relation.' The relational understanding of *hypostasis* suggests that the human's essence lies not in individual existence, but in interaction with God and creation: the human is not a living 'being' without interrelationship with others. The implications of this understanding appear in Zizioulas' re- definition of salvation. Salvation is not a deliverance of the individual from submission to sin and slavery by gaining chaotic freedom. Rather, salvation is being in the image of God by participating in God's relational personality. It is in becoming a relational creature and realizing our being as 'creature in communion.' Only then does one gain a real ontological sense of existence. Salvation is deliverance from individualistic isolation that separates the human from herself, from God and from life in general (p.5). Whilst this understanding of Trinitarian theology has its critics (e.g. Awad, 2010; Volf, 1998), Zizioulas (1985) does offer a useful contribution to the understanding of the Divine within (self-awareness) and the Divine purpose that seeks 'to become' and 'to relate' – i.e. to deepen relationship with God, self and others, which is the implicit and explicit purpose of SRGs. Gunton (1993) does, however, state that the Spirit makes the triune communion a free *perichoresis*, where the one and the many, being and relationship, person and substance, coincide as one God. Foster et al. (2006, p.100) state that 'human encounter with that mystery [of human existence] has often been described as participation in the creative and redemptive activity of God, and is symbolised by notions of salvation, redemption, *tikkun* (the healing of the earth) and *shalom* (the harmony intended in creation)'. Applying this thinking to a SRG context, it is the Group, consisting of many, but yet being as one, which enables a form of salvation (i.e. a journey towards wholeness), through enabling a greater sense of healing to be achieved – although there is always a danger that the life of God is too quickly mapped onto human life. This is not to say that an SRG is the only way towards wholeness and healing – but one way.

### **7.3.2 Becoming**

This Trinitarian recognition of holding diversity in unity, and of recognizing personhood both as individual *and* as interdependent, interactive and in communion, was evident in the data – and holding these attributes enabled a sense of 'becoming' through relationship with others and with God:

“Talking about the Church becoming a movement, and what I kind of thought was small groups which are in a sense familial, but in the terms of the early Christian community or the discipleship community are alternative family, and they are family with difference, aren’t they? They are a drawing together of diversity which leads to a union that is familial. That enables really complicated human processes, probably from desire to competition, to anger, to betrayal, which feels, when you talk about it like that, very much like a therapy group. I’m not suggesting the disciples were in fact a therapy group, but there was a containing space for that, and to me, that is also something Trinitarian going on in that, and engaging with kind of parallel dynamics” (BA6).

“What you are hoping is that people become what they are intended ‘to be’. There is something about growing up here, into a sort of maturity.... God wants the person to flourish. You have to trust in that kind of dynamic energy which as a Christian, I could associate with God’s presence, or energy, or active spirit, in the world... to be in that process, and to not contain it; but that it – I don’t know how to put it – that it is ‘present’ in there. When Rogers talks about the actualising tendency, I’ve always found it’s tended to make that mark over ... and to wonder about the actualising tendency, you know. Is it that kind of biological thing? I don’t think that it is. It’s something else and... That sense of becoming... and there’s a trust in that. Otherwise you’d think, well, this experience of brokenness, or this experience of breaking down. You wouldn’t think it was going to be (swopping models) some form of individuation process if you didn’t trust that was a potential possibility” (BA6).

In this process of ‘becoming’ (or *transformation into that which God intended*), Davies (2013), as stated in Gubi (in press), states that the key point of ‘Transformation Theology’ is that Christ is real, genuinely shares our time and space, and effects change through the Holy Spirit. If one is changed, then others are changed also, just as one is transformed by the change in others through Christ. ‘Nothing is more personal than this kind of reorientation of life. But it is precisely where my life becomes most personal in this sense of undergoing real change, that I find myself positioned, in unity with others, before God the Triune Creator in Jesus Christ. At the point when I am most me, I find I am most him, or he is most in me, as I am in him... This is an inclusive, life-giving Trinitarian space. I know that others too are with me there, in whom he is and who also are in him, and I know too that it is the world – as it is transformed in him – that is the true source of change in me’ (p.18). The essence of Transformation Theology, then, is to discern *where Christ is* in any given situation,

and it is in the ordinary, as is constructed theologically, that Davies (2013) argues is 'the site of our potential encounter with Christ' (p.21). That which is transformative does the work of the word 'love' which Davies (2013) argues is fundamentally mysterious within the everyday (p.22). However, it is unclear from Davies' work whether the true source of transformation is the Holy Spirit or 'the world'.

### 7.3.3 Community

This 'Transformation Theology' can form part of the coming together of disparate persons (i.e. community) who have Christ in their midst, and His work as their purpose. As demonstrated in Gubi (in press), SRGs can be a place for theological reflection and for developing 'heart theology'. Braudaway-Bauman (2012) concludes her article by stating that 'at the centre of Christian life... is a commitment to community and a promise from Jesus that he will show up whenever two or three are gathered in his name' (p. 25). An emphasis on thinking about the SRG as 'community' is evident in the data, yet theologically emphasised in different ways. For some, the emphasis is on remembering that each is part of a greater whole, which some found comforting:

"Humanity has been created for community with God and others, and these groups remind us that we are not lonely individuals but part of a greater whole" (D2P6).

"I suppose my theology is that I don't believe God wastes anything - fatherly concept - very open for self-discovery, so that's God and the Holy Spirit at work, you could say. Revealing that which is before. It certainly conveys a sense of, 'I'm not just an individual'. You know, I've become a clergyman and this places a huge mantle on me when I get ordained or when I get my first parish. A huge core gets dumped on me – responsibility - and everybody clears off the next day. This is how it may make clergy feel, isolated and alone. But I think we are trying to mirror, you know, you are not alone. You are part of the Body, and this is one place where you might feel the benefit of being part of that Body" (BA7).

In these two quotations from D2P6 and BA7, the *perichoresis* (i.e. mutual interpenetration) takes away isolation and provides safety for aspects of the Trinity to be at work. Reflecting the theology of 1 Corinthians 12: 12-30, BA3 expressed his/her understanding of the SRG in terms of the 'Body of Christ', emphasising the valuing of difference, where each part is important, and yet part of a whole:

“We are the body of Christ, so a group seems to be a particularly good way of expressing that and of recognising the different gifts and the different parts - the way the different parts of the body interact with each other and support each other” (BA3).

Here, the emphasis within the *perichoresis* is on the recognition of difference within the union of the Body. These data also reflect the writing of Bonhoeffer (2015/1954), who emphasised ‘community’ in the sense of ‘being-with-each-other and being-for-each-other’ (Green, 1999, p.125).

‘Every Christian community must realise that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of the fellowship’ (Bonhoeffer, 1954/2015, p. 72).

#### **7.3.4 Relational nature of God**

For others, the emphasis within the *perichoresis* found in an SRG reflected more of the relational nature of God which Christians are called to emulate (*imitatio dei*):

“Just a kind of theological comment as it were on what groups are doing is that I feel, in the end, that at best they are reflecting the relational nature of God and I think that is quite important and I take that kind of thinking from Barth - that sort of Trinitarian understanding, sort of relationality of God, and say that we are called to do that; and that that kind of depth of relating in a group mirrors that in some way, and I think that is important” (BA5).

As stated in Gubi (in press), Rose (2012, p.6-8) emphasises that there can be no sense of self without other, for we are created in, and through, relationships. Relationships are needed in order to know more (gain wisdom and insight) about ourselves and our issues. Others give us confidence in our own self-description. Either through a powerful sense of isolation or a profound connection, absence or presence of another is central to our experiencing. As McFadyen (1990, p.7) states: ‘We become the people we are as our identities are shaped through patterns of communication and response in which we are engaged. We carry the effects of the communication we have received and the responses we have made in the past forward with us into every situation and relationship’.

Elsewhere, I have argued the necessity of relationship to the concept of ‘becoming’ and ‘growing’ in our potential as people who are made in the image of God (Gubi, 2015a). That sense of ‘becoming in relationship’, was echoed by BA6 (see **section 5.2.5.9**). Theologically, this can be seen as relationship enables ‘the journey from us to God and from God to us’ (Schmid, 2006, p.8). Rogers (1980) suggests

that in order for a person to self-actualise and become that which they are truly capable of being<sup>24</sup>, then an enabling relationship must be present. Although Rogers' work has been criticised by some as being 'individualistic' (e.g. Hurding, 1985), Thorne (2002, p.10) states that authentic self-actualisation has to be *socially mediated* because we are relational. Therefore, we can only achieve our full potential in relationship/community – which a SRG can provide. McFadyen (1990) states that 'the Genesis creation narratives speak of human creation together in God's image in a way that should make impossible any talk of individuals as isolated, individual entities because the narratives affirm that human persons are intrinsically related to one another and to God' (p18). This way of thinking does not deny a person's autonomy and independence<sup>25</sup>, but it acknowledges the freedom on which personal relationships are based, rather than regarding them as being coercive. 'What is distinctive about the human relationship to God in creation is that God's creative and sustaining activity elicits, enables and deserves a free and thankful response' (McFadyen, 1990, p.19). McFadyen states that that need for dialogue with God and with each other is a grace, a gift and a 'letting-be'. We can refuse to dialogue with God, but we *cannot not be* in relationship with God. We are called to 'personhood' through relationship with ourselves, with God and with each other. A SRG provides an opportunity, an ethos and a space that is characterised by relationship, a desiring to become-that-which-we-are-capable-of-becoming, a grace, a gift and a letting-be-in-love which is achieved through its non-directiveness, respectfulness, love, authenticity and its acknowledgment of God's presence through attitude, purpose and symbolism (Gubi, 2011). Within this, *perichoresis* can be seen as a form of *nature-perichoresis* where participants are relationally 'making each other' in relationship; sharing attributes of each other within the oneness of the Body – which is the Group.

### 7.3.5 Incarnational

Another way of theologically understanding the SRG, from the data, is as an incarnational space, and a place to recognise hope through failure:

"There are incarnational things that are being done. It's a balance against the training becoming too cerebral... That actually we are in ministry, and ministry is to do with supporting people, and understanding people, and enabling people, and helping them grow. And we are looking for Christ in them, and they are hopefully finding Christ in us, and the Spirit is working between us, and that's incarnational. If you spend too much

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<sup>24</sup> That is, a fully-functioning person, which theologically can be understood as 'becoming closer to the Divine within' - the process which Thorne (2003, p.68) describes as 'letting-go and letting-be, the process of Divinisation - and to the image of God in which we are made [Genesis 1:26] with Christ as exemplar (Thorne, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Schmid (2006, p.25) argues that, 'both autonomy and interrelatedness as a person are responses to God's call into relationship with them'.

time theologising and doing all sorts of really important biblical work which will make your sermons amazing, etc., but you don't do the other work which enables you to understand people, and how to make connections with them, it won't come to very much. I think also these groups do provide people with a lot of challenge and how they deal with challenge. People who want there to be – the sort of people who say at the beginning of the group, 'What's the purpose of this group, and what are its aims and objectives? How will we know when they've been achieved?' and all that sort of thing. The open-ended indefinable, intangible benefits are really difficult for them to work with, and yet that is the nature of so much of what we do. And so that's quite a good lesson, and also I think there's a huge sense of failure very often. "This is no good. I am no good. I'm not the sort of person to do this. I'm not as good as they are"; and all those insecurities that come up especially more in a group where people listen to each other and think, "...help, I'm not like that. I can't do it". That should enable, if it's properly facilitated and people are safe enough, to express some of that. That should enable an exploration of failure in a non-cerebral way, and it seems to me that that's happily at the root of our Christian theology too. The cross is the ultimate failure, isn't it, in terms of normal human experience and understanding, and yet it's on that, that redemption is based. So, you know, there are all sorts of possible theological spin-offs" (BA3).

Within my previous research (Gubi, 2011, p.62), the word 'incarnational' was used to make theological sense of the experiencing of the Spiritually Reflexive Group:

'There's something very incarnational about every person here matters, and about what each person here brings to the group... that's very much where I am in terms of understanding the community of... the kingdom of God essentially. Everyone comes with wounds and with gifts. All are welcomed and all are valued' (M2). 'For me, the incarnation is something about our presence with one another [which] speaks of God's presence with us' (F1).

Dominian (1998) states that, 'Jesus revealed that love and communion among persons are the truth of existence, the meaning of our salvation, the overcoming of sin, and the means by which God is praised. That is what incarnation is' (p. 230). Williams (2000) states that there are different ways of thinking about incarnation theology. One way is that God became human, and has shown that human nature can carry the divine glory. This means that God has raised humanity to a new dignity

by opening everyone to a share in the fellowship of the body. Williams, though, does not argue that the body should be in harmony – but that difference can be valued in unity, as human community is rooted in the communal existence of the Trinity. The purpose of community is to ‘construct’ each other’s humanity, ‘bringing each other into the inheritance of power and liberty whose form is defined by Jesus’ (Williams, 2000, p. 232).

‘As we are reconstituted by relationship with Christ, our capacity for relation with each other is naturally changed as well. All our relationships with each other thus acquire new dimensions; all may be open to the totality of divine revelation... The Church proclaims and struggles to realise a ‘belonging together’ of persons in community in virtue of nothing but a shared belonging with or to the risen Christ’ (Williams, 2000, pp. 226-231).

Williams argues that it is the role of the Church to make it easier for people to grow into maturity ‘in which they are free to give to one another and nourish one another, free enough to know that they have the capacity to be involved in re-creating persons. That maturity is substantively possible in encounter with the giving God incarnate in Christ; but the empirical human possibilities of growing in it are to a great extent shaped, even if not fully determined, by what we already belong to, and how’ (Williams, 2000, pp. 236-237). In bringing this about, Williams argues for an attitude of service to be the currency of exchange between believers, for growth into Jesus’ Lordship to be able to wash one another’s feet, as a welcoming attitude as guests at the same table (p. 232). Nash (2002) states that *kenosis*<sup>26</sup> is a characteristic of incarnational theology. Whilst *kenosis* theology embraces the humanity of Jesus, as opposed to his divinity (and SRGs are a place that participants are encouraged to embrace the fullness of their humanity), some theologians, when writing about *kenosis* (e.g. Mahoney, 2000; Macquarrie, 1974) emphasise the emptying out of ‘self’ and the embracing of self-denial. Whilst SRGs are a place to fully *embrace* self, and *acknowledge* self, part of their character is as a place where you don’t have to strive for status or boast about your achievements. Moltmann (1981) argues that *perichoresis*, as revealed in the Trinity, ‘corresponds to a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession’ (p. 198). In that sense, Group members practice a kind of discipline of self-effacement in order to give one another the time they need to talk. Gunton (1997) puts the emphasis in *kenosis* theology on self-denial, on God being able ‘to empty himself on behalf of that which he is not’ (p. 172). Putting

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<sup>26</sup> *Kenosis* is ‘a joyous, kind and loving attitude that is willing to give up selfish desires and to make sacrifices on behalf of others for the common good and the glory of God, doing this in a generous and creative way, avoiding the pitfall of pride and inspired by the love of God and the gift of grace’ (Ellis, 2001, p. 108).

that concept in the context of SRGs, in seeking to imitate Christ, through grace, *kenosis* can also be seen in participants using the space to reflect and filter out ‘process’ that is not theirs’ (i.e. which is contaminated by that of others), to enable them to be more fully present to others in their encounters with others. All of these ways of thinking about incarnation underpin the attitudinal qualities to be found in, and purpose of, SRGs. Bonhoeffer (1966) writes of incarnational theology as seeing Christ as ‘a beggar among beggars, as an outcast among the outcast, despairing among the despairing, dying among the dying’ (p. 111) – a Christ whom Christians must imitate (*imitatio dei*).

### 7.3.6 Vulnerability

SRGs can be seen as a place where vulnerability can be expressed and accompanied, as Christ partook in vulnerability and in the accompaniment of the vulnerable. This mirrors Kelly’s (2014) ‘Theology of Presence’. As stated in Gubi (in press), Kelly, although writing from within the context of pastoral supervision, refers to the development of the embodiment of reflection in practice, and then being able to risk responding and acting with *phronesis* (or practical wisdom)<sup>27</sup>. This leads to a theology that embraces risk as we face our vulnerable self. It risks staying with the ‘mundane, even the boring, and being familiar with their patterns so that the treasure which points to possible transformation and glimpses of transcendence may be intuited and mined for’ (p.47). This requires a reflexive, embodied self in order to create opportunities for personal and professional growth, characterised by tenderness, gentleness and grace; requiring us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:39) and to give forgiveness to self and others in a co-created safe space, secure in the knowledge that we are loved unconditionally by God (all part of *perichoretic unity*). The embodied, reflexive self is the primary resource to facilitate the promotion of shared vulnerability and real possibilities of learning and transformation. This theology of vulnerability was evident in the data:

“It’s an experience of being vulnerable, and if you are going to go into ministry and you are going to be proclaiming a theology, which, after all, is based on vulnerability - because you can’t get much more vulnerable than the baby born out of wedlock and made a refugee, etc., or the broken body on the cross. So, your theology is based on vulnerability and strength through vulnerability. It is absolutely no good at all to be immune from experiencing your own vulnerability and defended against it, because how can you possibly walk alongside someone who is?” (BA3).

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<sup>27</sup> Kelly (2014, p.41) defines *Phronesis* as ‘being the creative and discerning use of knowledge (including awareness of self) in the moment acquired through ongoing reflective practice and engagement with a relevant evidence base informing practice.



### 7.3.7 Loving self and neighbour

The love of self, Dominian (1998) states, is ‘possession of oneself which feels good and which is available in service to others’. This valuing of self in order to be available in the service of others, and the fact that an SRG is time that is deliberately set apart from the norm of daily life to regenerate ‘self’, was viewed by BA4 as:

“So in theological terms, it could be something around the fact that Jesus took himself away from the crowds – the sort of ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. Ministers are very good at attending to others, but not as good at looking after themselves; and it is this thing about, ‘is it selfish?’ ‘Is it self-indulgent?’ And self-care doesn’t mean self-denial? So around that, Jesus took time out to look after himself, to go to set aside time to pray, to be alone, to be with his disciples... If you’ve got nothing left to take up your cross with; if you are completely spent, if you are burnt out, then you’ve got nothing left. Nothing left to give to follow Jesus with. You know, recognising our humanness and our limits, and I don’t believe that Jesus meant us to be so depleted and so burnt out that we can’t have a ministry if it’s so burnt out, depleted. There’s nothing left to give and ministry is very much about giving. But if you are not giving to yourself, you’ve nothing left to give to others. And that’s the danger with clergy that are burnt out, and they just work harder but producing less, which is a great sadness, and when they say, “I haven’t a prayer life. I’m too busy”, there’s something really wrong there” (BA4).

BA5 expressed this idea of the group providing a place of sustenance in a different way – as reflecting the journey of the disciples in which “the group represented something about coming to a resource and taking something, and then going out, and it being worked out in practice”, and, making reference to Hebrews 12, as enabling participants to ‘run the race’ (or undertake the tasks of ministry).

### 7.3.8 Eucharistic living

Finally, BA1 spoke of the ritualistic nature of the group (with its contract and boundaries) as a form of “Eucharistic living” which provided a “container for discovering more about the Divine through the unconscious” through which redemption can be gained (again, part of the *perichoretic unity*). As well as the sense of ritual, the Eucharist (or Holy Communion as it is termed in my Moravian tradition) enables the coming together of individuals in one body as part of a sacred act (another form of *perichoretic unity*) or encounter.

#### **7.4 Summary**

Each of these reflections provides a theological understanding of SRGs. This chapter has integrated the data and the literature, and provided an exploration of some theological understanding of SRGs. In the final chapter, the limitations of the research will be considered, and ways of furthering the research will be put forward. The Thesis will be concluded and foci for reflexivity for SRGs will be advocated.

## Stage 4: Reformulating Revised Practice

### Chapter 8: Conclusion

In this chapter, the limitations of the research will be discussed, and ways in which the research can be furthered will be suggested. Based on the research, suggestions for practice will be made.

#### 8.1 Limitations of the research

This research has sought to answer the research question: *Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?* with the aims of the research being:

- To explore if, and how, reflexivity is developed in clergy training;
- To explore if, and in what way(s) [if any], SRGs might support and build up the ministry of the Church;
- To examine how SRGs might be understood theologically, psychologically and relationally.

Clearly, and deliberately, the research is limited by the parameters of the research, which have been to boundary the research within the context of the CofE. This provided a finite number of TEIs to approach and BAs to interview, but it may be the case that SRGs happen more in TEIs of other denominations - although there was little literature to suggest that this is the case. In seeking to ascertain how reflexivity is developed in CofE ordination training, the research was limited by a reluctant response from the TEI principals. This did not enable a full picture to emerge of how reflexivity is developed in ordination training. What emerged was nonetheless an adequate picture, with 46% of TEIs responding. However, there may be SRG-type groups, which adhere to the definition of SRGs more, being utilised in TEIs. Arguably, the research was limited by the method of data collection (email), and by not visiting TEIs to interview the principals, or to gain a fuller picture of the group work that the data reveal actually takes place. The research is also limited by the fullness of the responses received, but mostly very full responses were gained. The research is limited by concentrating on Bishops' Advisors for Pastoral Care and Counselling who were members of the Anglican Association for Advisors in Pastoral Care and Counselling. Whilst, again, this set a workable parameter to the research, it emerged that the responsibility for RPGs formed part of some diocesan departments, other than those for whom the BAs were responsible. These departments were contacted too when they came into awareness, but with little response. However, this indicates that RPGs are happening more widely in CofE dioceses than this research has been able to capture. The research is limited by the response rate of the BAs (19%), which meant

that only eight BAs could be interviewed. Nonetheless, the research arguably engages a sufficiently representative sample of the people who organise and/or facilitate SRG-type groups, and does enable the research to gain a reasonable picture of established practice in supporting clergy in ministry through the use of reflexive groups. However, the research is limited to the perceptions of eight Bishops' Advisors who arguably have an interest in validating the groups as they either organise or facilitate them.

The research is also limited to the RG participants of only three dioceses (n=37), and through the data collection method used and the questions asked. The participants presumably gained from participating in the RGs, and stayed sufficiently long enough to be approached to complete the evaluation (albeit there is one dissenting voice, D1P16, which is good to have as a representation of such a voice). However, it is not known if everyone who started a RG in the dioceses was sent the online survey, or only those who completed the run of the RG in which they were involved. Arguably, the use of focus groups, consisting of participants of reflexive groups, might have enabled a fuller picture to emerge, although it may not have broadened the perspective (e.g. by giving greater access to dissenting voices). However, there were issues of confidentiality and permissions which excluded that method of data collection. Nonetheless, the picture that emerges through the statistical and qualitative data of the participants' *lived experience* is interesting, and contributes some informative insight from the perspectives of participants, into the value of SRG-type groups.

There may also be an argument to be made, from a theological and ecclesiological perspective, that this research is yet another example of the 'psychological captivity of the Church' (Jones, 1995), although I would argue that it is an example of psychology and theology in dialogue (mutual conversation) for the benefit of the Church.

Arguably the research is limited by the lens that I, as researcher, have brought to the research. In qualitative research, 'bias' is a questionable entity. Instead, there is recognition that the values and experiences of the researcher shape the lens through which the data and literature are evaluated. Another researcher would bring a different lens to bear on the data. Therefore, no universal claims will be made from this research, but the research will offer 'pointers' towards possibilities and further research and practice.

## **8.2 Areas identified for further research**

The research could be furthered in a number of ways:

- Through examining what practice is current in the development of reflexivity in the theological colleges of denominations other than the CofE, and the place of SRGs within that;

- Through the gaining of grant capture to set up, fund, facilitate and evaluate the usefulness of SRGs in CofE TEIs;
- Through collaborative research with an organisation like St. Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy, who are interested in promoting the psychological wellbeing of clergy, to evaluate if SRGs, when encountered in TEIs, enable better psychological health among clergy, and if they establish a better culture of self-care within ministry.

### **8.3 Answering the research question**

*Do Spiritually Reflexive Groups have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry?* In answering this research question, and within the stated limitations of the research, the data indicate that SRGs do have a beneficial place in clergy training, and in supporting clergy, towards enabling a more effective ministry. However, this indication needs to be tested by further research, as SRGs are seemingly not part of training for ordination. The benefits were identified in the data (both from BAs and RG participants) as offering support, enabling clergy to feel less isolated, enabling clergy to gain an insight into the way that they think and into the impact of their way of being on others. They acknowledged that the RG enabled clergy to respect difference better and to gain a better sense of self-care. The RG enabled clergy to engage in a better quality of pastoral encounter with others and to interact better with others in their ministry. The RGs were identified as enabling clergy to grow as human beings, enabling trust and vulnerability to be experienced safely. The RG was identified in the data as enabling clergy to negotiate boundaries better. The data from the RG participants' perspectives indicate additional areas of benefit not evident from the statistical analysis. Benefits stated are: feeling listened to and valued; learning to listen to others better; learning from others; valuing one's own ministry more; having space to think and reflect; permission to be one's self; the realisation that one is not alone in the struggles of ministry; a place to vent frustrations and express difficulties; and a place to reflect theologically and practically. So there is evidence in the data that is indicative of the effectiveness of RGs in supporting ministry. This cannot be made as a universal claim because of the small numbers of participants involved, but it does point to the effectiveness of RGs in supporting ministry.

The data from the BAs (see **section 5.2.1.5**) also demonstrate an overwhelming support for SRGs in TEIs. BAs considered them to be a place where the seeds of self-reflection could be sown and nurtured, which could continue to be nurtured after training, as a culture of taking part in SRGs would be established (BA5). The essential nature of developing self-awareness in building self-sufficiency and resilience was highlighted (BA4), and the role of SRGs in assisting them to be developed. SRGs could enable a better culture of self-care to be established (BA4), alongside the

development of a more fluid attitude to ministry and theology (BA3). Some concern was raised about the mandatory nature of SRGs in TEIs, which raised the potential of sabotage (see **section 5.2.4.7**), and there was some recognition that not everyone is suited to SRGs (see **section 5.2.1.7** and **section 5.2.4.3**), but overall the BAs considered the inclusion of SRGs in TEIs to be beneficial to enable ordinands to ‘function with a kind of psychological literacy’ (BA6). BA6 felt that TEI principals would object to their inclusion because of the lack of explicit theological input, but BA6 also stated that ‘God might actually be at work in the psychological milieu’ (BA6). The main concern expressed by the RG participants, who were surveyed, was the lack of overt spirituality (see **section 7.2** above) and the unstructured nature of the groups (D1P16), and how they would fit into a TEI curricular structure. However, the data from the participants reveal a mostly supportive response to the inclusion of SRGs in ordination training (see **section 6.2.3.1**), as a pedagogy that would enable ordinands to flourish and feel more supported in their training and ministries. Reflexive practice ‘instils habits of reflection that will foster resilience in ministry and sustain practitioners in a ministry that has the capacity to respond creatively to a constantly shifting paradigm’ (Dennison, 2014, p. 107). The underpinning theological opportunities also seem evident from the data.

#### **8.4 Reformulating revised practice**

Charry (1997, p.18) argues for forms of ‘divine pedagogy’ in TEIs, which are the means by which theology is developed, that informs the processes which enable the formation of character, and assists in the building and maintaining the community of faith, and enables the communication of that faith to the wider world. Kinast (1996, p.20) states that there is a divine dimension to the origin of all experience which requires the ability to reformulate one’s theology in order to express the truth which the theology intends (p.122). This involves the use of reflexivity in the formation of ordinands. Dennison (2014) states that developing this level of reflectivity demands time to honestly reflect, and a willingness to be vulnerable to re-enter a dissonant situation and consider the situation critically from a variety of perspectives. The reflexive element to this involves a search of self, and of one’s own process, to know what one has brought to an experience (or encounter), as well as engaging with the perceptions of tradition, faith positions and biblical understanding, towards a personal and theological reflection, and an appropriate pastoral response.

One place to develop this level of reflexivity and *phronesis* is SRGs; yet, there is little in the literature on the value of non-directive SRGs in ordination training. This deficit is possibly because of a fear of their non-directiveness and lack of control over the agenda, and levels of honesty which can engender uncertainty and silence with which people can be uncomfortable or which challenge the lack of authenticity that is prevalent in many Church communities (Gubi, 2011). Other difficulties

with relationship-centred approaches to small groups have been identified by Rynsburger and Lamport (2008, pp.116-126) as being: that spiritual growth in such groups can be problematic; that they promote 'feel good' spirituality rather than biblically-based faith; that they assume that a simple loving and intimate community will promote spiritual growth, when what they promote and reflect are cultural values rather than spiritual values; that they discard a 'truth only model' and emphasise experience and relationships over biblical truths. Rynsburger and Lamport (2008, p.122) state that if scripture is simply viewed as a collection of individual faith journeys, which it is in relationship-centred small groups, it will hold less authority than a Bible that teaches timeless truths and doctrines. Rynsburger and Lamport (2008; 2009), and Lamport and Rynsburger (2008), therefore argue for the centrality of scripture in small groups. These are certainly criticisms to be mindful of.

#### **8.4.1 A change of name**

It is not the intention of this research to create yet a different form/title of RG group and add another type of group to the existing plethora. However, it is clear from **section 7.2.3** that the spiritual/theological is missing from current RG experience. Renaming them as *Spiritually* Reflexive Groups helps to re-establish that missing element – although regaining the spiritual/theological without a name change is also possible, providing the spiritual/theological is acknowledged. (S)RGs will thus be used as an acronym to indicate that a name change is not being advocated, but that the research indicates the value of the spiritual/theological being reclaimed (Chandler, 2009).

#### **8.4.2 Reclaiming the spiritual in RG groups**

Gubi (2011; in press) reveals that SRGs were an established method of pastoral and theological development within the Moravian Church. Although *non-directive*, Graf (2012, p.8) suggests content for reflexivity of each participant in SRGs:

- 'How do you know God? How has God worked in your life up to this point?
- How do you feel about your current relationship with God?
- Where did God work in your life this week/month? Where is God leading you?
- What obstacles this week/month hampered your relationship with God?
- What will you do to handle these obstacles and draw closer to God this week/month?'

In my previous research (Gubi, 2011, p. 58), participants were encouraged to reflect on the following self-questioning from the 'Let's Do Theology Spiral' (Green, 2009, p.25) of 'Experience, Explore, Reflect, Respond, New Situation'. That is (summarised):

- ‘What did I *experience* in terms of my personal and spiritual development?’
- *Explore* how that came about for me (process). What aided that?
- *Reflect* on what I have learned from that experiencing about myself or about my relationship with God.
- How might I *respond* (or understand God) differently or ‘in a new way’?
- How might I approach *situations* differently as a result of the insight I have gained?’

Sims (2011), likewise, suggests the following similar self-reflection questions:

- ‘What did I do well?’
- What was difficult?’
- What surprised me?’
- How do I sense that God was active in this situation?’
- Would I do anything differently the next time?’ (summarised from Sims, 2011, p. 169)

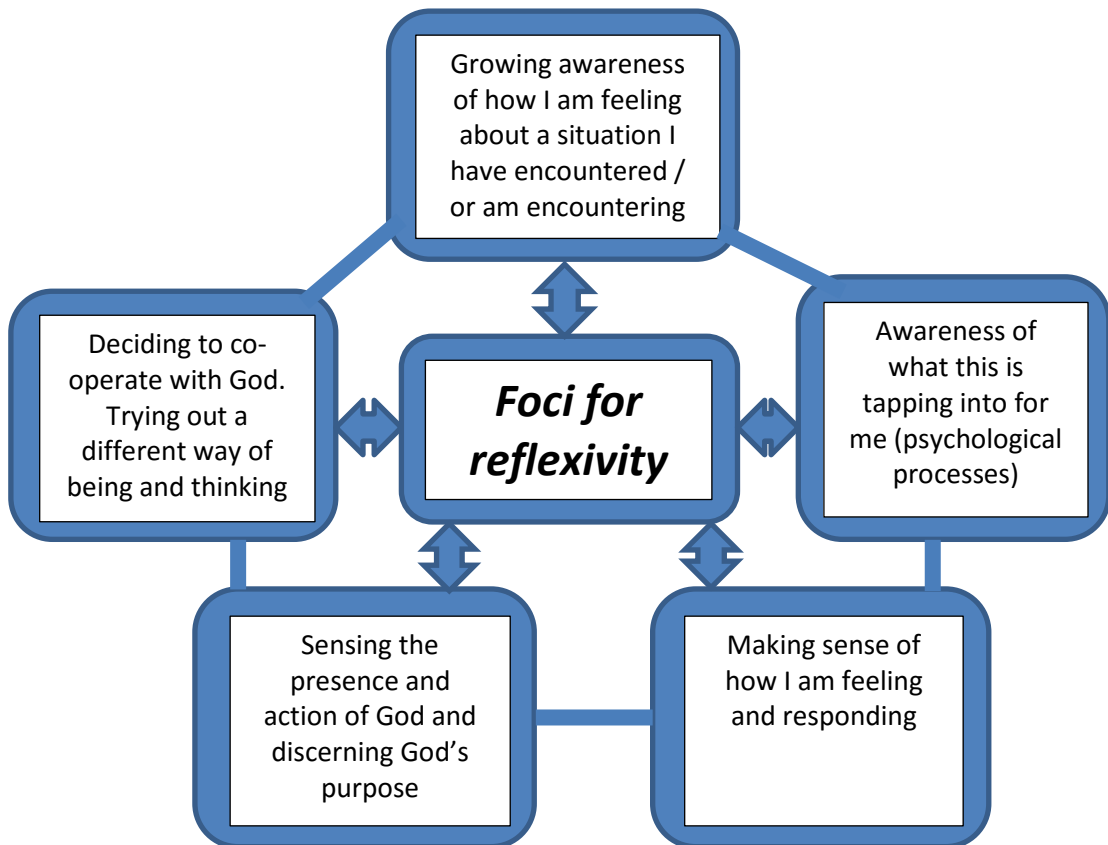
All of these similar self-questioning approaches enable the pedagogy established in **Figure 2** (see **Section 2.3**) to be developed. Sims (2011) states that if such reflective practice is engaged with, then learning can be ‘deep’, and different from much of the ‘surface learning’ that goes on in ordination training. He concludes that quality ministry is more likely when theologically reflective practice is engaged in using his proposed theological lens of ‘*sensing the presence and action of God, discerning God’s purpose, integrating into one’s theology, and deciding to co-operate with God*’ (p.175). The addition of my further suggested level of awareness (Reflexive Perspective) required from reflexivity, enables a deepening of the awareness of the part (and the past) that the person brings to the encounter, or to the experience, that they are faced with. This, in addition to the other areas of attention identified by Sims (2011), arguably provides a more reflexive response, which I would argue enhances self-awareness and deepens insight, enabling a better pastoral and theological response, in keeping with the development of reflexive theology and reflexive practice.

So, from this research, as a means of formulating revised practice, the following foci for reflexivity are advocated (see **Figure 3**). These foci for reflexivity enable a fairly systematic approach for the development of reflexivity within the (S)RG context, and include the psychological and the spiritual/ theological. Recommendations for instigating (S)RGs as revised practice are:

- The (S)RG is not structured in its content (i.e. it is non-directive, but focussed on psychological and spiritual process, holding the foci for reflection in Figure 3 with attention). The content emerges from what is ‘around’ for the group participants.



- The data and literature suggest that each (S)RG should consist of between six and ten participants who negotiate an agreement (covenant or contract) consisting of confidentiality and practicalities (time, place, frequency, cost).
- The (S)RG meets weekly in TEIs (preferably), and monthly in dioceses, for at least one and a half hours (preferably two hours).



**Figure 3. Foci for reflexivity in (Spiritually) Reflexive Groups**

- The (S)RG is facilitated by an external facilitator (who is preferably counsellor/psychotherapy trained and not on the staff of the same TEI as the participants, or who is likely to have dual relationships with participants) who is trained in group facilitation and group process, and who is able to facilitate at a spiritual- and psychological- process level.
- The facilitator keeps the group focussed on the internal reflexivity task, and the sharing within the group of that, embodying and exemplifying a quality of servanthood, service and hospitality. The time is not to be divided equally between participants, nor does everyone have to speak. However, a good facilitator will 'notice' and 'invite' non-contributors as appropriate.
- Participants, too, will be encouraged to listen deeply, share appropriately and facilitate each other with the foci for reflexivity in mind.
- The data reveal that having two facilitators for each group has its own (arguably useful) dynamic, but given the limited financial resources in TEIs and dioceses, two facilitators are not necessary.
- Facilitators mindfully hold awareness of the aspects that may limit a group (see **section 7.2.2**) and do what they can to overcome them where possible.
- Because there is always the potential for the process to become unhelpful, facilitators will need to be in supervision.
- Facilitators will also need to be able to facilitate fluidly in ways that move relatively easily between the spiritual (theological) and the psychological.

### 8.5 Concluding comment

This research indicates the value of (S)RGs (see **section 8.3**) in supporting clergy, creating a culture of self-care and in enhancing their ministry. Utilising (S)RGs in TEIs supports *formation*, develops *phronesis*, and enables the spiritual discernment and theological reflection that Ladd (2014) advocates, to be developed *in community*. Chandler's (2009) research identifies ministerial support groups (or (S)RGs) as a valuable form of support. Chandler further identifies 'spiritual dryness' as a primary predictor of emotional exhaustion. Because of this, Chandler emphasises that 'by virtue of their calling, [pastors] need to nurture an ongoing and renewing relationship with God, to maintain life balance, reduce stress and avoid burnout' (p. 284). Chandler concludes her research by arguing that 'seminaries... [i.e. TEIs] can assist their candidates to develop healthy personal practices [and should be] a crucial curricular consideration' (p. 285). Braudaway-Bauman (2012), likewise, argues for a *community of practice* for intentional reflection. (S)RGs provide participants with a safe place to 'act from the centre' in order to 'give God freedom in the world, to do the works of God' (Williams, 2000). They are also a form of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology of 'Christ existing as community' as both a form of 'Church' (i.e. Christian community), and as a place that enables and sustains 'Church... to be

there for others...’, enabling the facilitation and articulation of limitations, struggles and failures (McBride, 2014, pp. 92-95). With the emphasis within the ‘Formation Criteria for Ordained Ministry’ (see **section 0.2**) now on the development of reflexivity (Church of England, 2014, pp 10-15), this research suggests that (S)RGs would be a helpful way of responding to those formation criteria, developing a theology of the heart, and fostering good self-care practices for future ministry. Indeed, the future of the Church may depend on clergy developing, and having, those skills. However, this research is merely a contribution to a conversation, in which theological integrity is sought. It in no way seeks to be the final word on reflective practice with clergy, and the place of reflexive groups within developing that reflexivity. ‘It thus lives with the constant possibility of its own relativizing, interruption, silencing; it will not regard its conclusions as having authority independently of their relation to the critical, penitent community it seeks to help to be itself’ (Williams, 2000, p. 13).

## **8.6 Post-Thesis Reflexive Statement**

Having undertaken this research, I have come to realise that I have probably been unconsciously motivated by a response to my own feelings of isolation in my ministry, and in my ordination training. I initially thought that I was bringing to the research mostly my joy of facilitating Personal Development Groups (PDGs) in counsellor training contexts, and my wonderment about their appropriateness in ordination training, following my initial research within my own ordination training (Gubi, 2011). Whilst these certainly remain valid motivating factors, I have come to realise in the course of the research that, at another level, I am responding to the desire (yearning) for greater collegiality (community), and a deeper level of meeting / encounter, with my fellow clergy in the Moravian Church and in ecumenical relations, where fraternity feels largely superficial, business-orientated and ‘surface’ to me. There is a great sadness, for me, that *Banden* no longer forms part of what the Moravian Church offers, and yet I can see enormous value in its utilisation – especially among the clergy, who in my experience, often seem to lack depth, self-awareness and authentic spiritual journeying (although there are rare exceptions to this).

When I started out on this research journey, I had little idea of the group support that is offered to clergy in the CofE. I have been surprised, and heartened, by the band of dedicated facilitators who have set up such groups within the CofE dioceses, largely independent of each other (but increasingly collaboratively due to this research). I have been struck that such groups are only sustained by sympathetic Bishops and Archdeacons, and that established provision has been suspended and dismantled by unsympathetic Bishops and Archdeacons who have withdrawn funding. The lack of research in this area leaves such groups lacking an evidence base, and vulnerable to the whims and sympathies of diocesan managers. However, I have been heartened by

the determination of many Bishops' Advisors who keep going, on the basis that their lived experience is that these groups are beneficial to clergy, for the reasons that are highlighted in this Thesis. This research now underpins their lived experience, validates and supports their work.

I have been saddened, and surprised, in my findings by the seemingly active negation of spirituality and theological reflection in RPGs for Clergy, which this research has uncovered. It reminded me of my early days in PDGs, as a counsellor trainee in the 1980/1990s, when I was denied the opportunity of speaking about my struggles with my personal faith, because spiritual issues weren't enabled, facilitated or even allowed, as the pervading view across the counselling/psychotherapy profession (and therefore in training) was that spiritual issues didn't belong in therapy. In that silencing, I felt very alone, alienated and gagged. Yet, I have come to see these groups as potentially providing a wonderful opportunity for developing deeper theological reflection and *phronesis* in community.

I have enjoyed learning about reflexive groups from a theological perspective, and have often felt moved and liberated by the theological language. I have discovered that Christian theology is rich in its expression of concepts of 'relationality', 'growth', 'becoming' and 'capacity for divine character' which has enriched my understanding of the possibilities of what reflexive groups offer, particularly through Trinitarian theology and Incarnation theology. During the research, I came across a sculptural depiction of 'The Trinity' from Barrett's (2010) research (see below), which is outside of Exeter Cathedral. It speaks to me of meeting, encounter, togetherness, depth-in-dialogue, sharing, hospitality, 'ministry of presence' – all of the qualities that are hopefully encountered in a reflexive group which encompasses the spiritual – and many of the qualities that I yearn for in my own ministry with colleagues. It reminds me of the PDGs that I facilitate, but sadly in which the spiritual is hardly spoken – and I too, collude with that. This research has led to a change in my praxis, to enable the spiritual to be voiced appropriately.

I have enjoyed the opportunity, through this research, of reflecting on what Heart Theology means to me from my Moravian tradition (see Gubi, in press), and of seeing how it has been expressed in different ways in the literature, e.g. embodied theological practice (Ladd, 2014) and in Sims' (2011) development of theologically reflexive practice. Heart Theology has informed the emergence of my eventual 'foci for reflexivity' (Figure 3), albeit the approach emerged at a tacit/reflexive level from the research, and from my yearning for putting in place what is missing in the existing provision of RPGs – and in my own life.



Images taken from <http://www.favata-sculpture.com/t1.html> [accessed 10/02/2016]

I have been surprised, and deeply moved, by the synchronicity that occurred throughout this research journey - of the doors that have opened to me, particularly in meeting Jan Korris of St. Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy, Julia Barrett from the Diocese of Exeter, and Revd Dr Sally Nash from St. John's College - and by the interest that has been shown in my research. I have been heartened by the wonderful people I have met on the journey – primarily the Bishops' Advisors whom I interviewed. I have been privileged in that the journey enabled me to gain a Visiting Scholarship to the USA, and I have been invited to the House of Lords to seek funding opportunities for furthering the research through St. Luke's Healthcare for the Clergy, which is exciting. The research journey has felt 'right', timely and fulfilling. There has been a strong sense of being 'led' and 'supported' in this research for a purpose that has yet to unfold clearly. My hope is that I can do justice in the dissemination of the research, which hopefully will include several peer-reviewed papers, presentations and a book, in order to increase its impact and influence. So, I am satisfied

with the research. It feels contained and meaningful. It feels that God is in it, enabling it to happen for His/Her greater purpose, whatever that may ultimately be.

The research has enabled me to feel theologically liberated from some of my isolation and sense of being silenced. Aspects of this research have been reflected on for years – unspoken, but yearned for. Rather than my personal theology being fundamentally changed, the research has enabled me to hear expressed from those I have met on the journey, that awareness which I have held onto secretly. To know that there are like-minded people, and that our thinking can be of value to the welfare of others, and to the development of *phronesis* and reflective theology, is gratifying. It feels like I have unearthed something of value, and unwittingly given credence and permission to the work and mission of others. God is certainly in it!

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## Appendix 1.



### Participant Information Sheet (Principals)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Dear TEI Principal,

I am approaching you to ask you for some information to help contextualise some research that I am undertaking. ***It should take no more than five minutes of your time.***

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

My research is part of a Professional Doctorate in Theology and Practice (DTh) that I am undertaking at the University of Winchester. I am interested in finding out about whether Spiritually Reflexive Groups, defined as '*a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level*', can help in developing reflexivity in those who are training for ordination, or those who have recently been ordained, towards enabling them to become better Ministers/Priests.

Rennie (1998, pp.2-3) defines reflexivity as '*the ability to think about ourselves, to think about our thinking, to feel about our feelings, to treat ourselves as objects of our attention and to use what we find there as a point of departure in deciding what to do next*'; and Hertz (1997, ppvii-xviii) describes reflexivity as '*an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment*'.

#### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

To help contextualise this research, please can you provide short answers, by return of email, to the questions below?:

- What parts of the curriculum that your Theological Education Institution teaches are specifically designed for the development of reflexivity in your students who are training for ordination?
- What pedagogical methods are used to assist in the development of reflexivity among your students who are training for ordination?

If you would be prepared to be contacted by me if further elaboration or clarification is needed on the information that you provide, please can you let me have your SKYPE address or/and telephone number?

### **Your right to withdraw without prejudice**

In providing answers to these questions by email, you are giving your consent for the information to be used in this project. However, you have every right to withdraw from the research at any time, without prejudice, up until the point that the analysis of your data has begun. Once the analysis has begun, it will be impossible to remove your data as it will be aggregated, making your data more difficult to identify.

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential, and how will my data be stored?**

The fact that you are taking part in the research, and everything that you share, will remain confidential. What you share will form part of the data which will be anonymised by use of a pseudonym or code (e.g. TEI 1). The data will be stored securely in locked premises, and kept encrypted on a password protected computer. Only I, and my Research Supervisors, Professor Neil Messer and Dr Angus Paddison, will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed (shredded or electronically deleted) after five years, in keeping with the data protection act.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I cannot foresee any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part, except the cost of your time.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The experience will give you time to reflect on your work, and to share your thoughts. This may contribute to something greater at research and policy level, in enhancing ordination training and in the support of newly ordained clergy.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

I cannot foresee anything going wrong. I will do everything within my ability to ensure your safety and confidentiality. However, if you are not happy with any aspect of the research process, please raise it with me. If you are still not happy, you may raise it with my Research Supervisor, Professor Neil Messer, at the University of Winchester.

<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology-religion-and-philosophy/staff%20profiles/pages/drneilmesser.aspx>

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The completed research will be stored (bound and electronic) at the University of Winchester. The research will be disseminated in future publications and at conferences.

### **Whom may I contact for further information?**

I, the researcher, am: Revd Professor Peter Gubi

My contact details are: [p.gubi@chester.ac.uk](mailto:p.gubi@chester.ac.uk)

My SKYPE address is: drpeter.gubi

To find out more about me: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/sps/staff/rev-pr-pm-gubi>

***Thank you for your interest in this research and for your help with it.***

## Appendix 2.



### Participant Information Sheet (Advisors)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Dear Bishop's Advisor for Pastoral Care and Counselling,

Thank you for responding to my recent email, for indicating that you facilitate a Spiritually Reflexive Group (or some version of it), and for indicating that you are interested in taking part in this research. This Information Sheet will hopefully explain what is involved, but if you need further clarification, then please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details below.

#### What is the purpose of the study?

This research is part of a Professional Doctorate in Theology and Practice (DTh) that I am undertaking at the University of Winchester. I am interested in finding out about whether Spiritually Reflexive Groups, defined as '*a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level*', can help in developing reflexivity in those who are training for ordination, or those who have recently been ordained, towards enabling them to become better Ministers/Priests. I would be interested in exploring your view on, and experience of, this.

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

To enable this, if you decide to take part, I will arrange a time to interview you face-to-face at your convenience, or to have a SKYPE/FaceTime interview with you if that is more convenient. Your written consent will be obtained through the enclosed consent form (which you can post or scan and email to me if the interview is conducted through SKYPE/FaceTime). The interview will be digitally recorded and last no more than an hour.

#### The interview will be semi-structured and be focussed around the following questions:

- Can you tell me something about the Spiritually Reflexive Group(s) that you facilitate, or that run in your Diocese?
- What benefits do you think it/they serve(s) [reflexively, relationally, self-care, pastoral care, preaching, theological exploration, any other]?
- Are any such groups run for ordinands as part of their training for Ministry in your Diocese?
- How might such groups be understood theologically?
- What are the hinderance factors of/in such groups?
- Are they a good thing for ordinands and newly ordained clergy? Why/why not?
- Is there anything else you may want to add?

Once the interview is complete, the digital recording will be transcribed. Your transcript will be allocated a pseudonym or code to protect your anonymity, and any identifying features in the data will be deleted. The transcript will be emailed to you to check for accuracy and to give you an opportunity

to amend or change any of the data. Your final written consent will be obtained, allowing me to begin the process of analysis of the data.

#### **Your right to withdraw without prejudice**

You have every right to withdraw from the research at any time, without prejudice, up until the point that the analysis of your data has begun. Once the analysis has begun, it will be impossible to remove your data as it will be aggregated, making your data more difficult to identify.

#### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I cannot foresee any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part, except the cost of your time. If, for any reason, personal issues are stirred for you, I am an experienced Counsellor so I will do my best to support you in the time we are together. I am also able to furnish you with a list of therapists in your locality whom you may be able to access.

#### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The experience will give you time to reflect on your work, and to share your thoughts. This may contribute to something greater at research and policy level, in enhancing ordination training and in the support of newly ordained clergy.

#### **What if something goes wrong?**

I cannot foresee anything going wrong. I will do everything within my ability to ensure your safety and confidentiality. However, if you are not happy with any aspect of the research process, please raise it with me. If you are still not happy, you may raise it with my Research Supervisor, Professor Neil Messer, at the University of Winchester.

<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology-religion-and-philosophy/staff%20profiles/pages/drneilmesser.aspx>

#### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential, and how will my data be stored?**

The fact that you are taking part in the research, and everything that you share, will remain confidential. In the unlikely event that Child Protection issues are raised, I may have to alert Social Services or Police, but otherwise, what you share will form part of the data which will be anonymised by use of a pseudonym or code. The data will be stored securely in locked premises, and kept encrypted on a password protected computer. Only I, and my Research Supervisor, will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed (shredded or electronically deleted) after five years, in keeping with the data protection act.

#### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The completed research will be stored (bound and electronic) at the University of Winchester. The research will be disseminated in future publications and at conferences.

#### **Whom may I contact for further information?**

I, the researcher, am: Revd Professor Peter Gubi.

My contact details are: [p.gubi@chester.ac.uk](mailto:p.gubi@chester.ac.uk)

To find out more about me: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/sps/staff/rev-pr-pm-gubi>

***Thank you for your interest in this research.***

## Appendix 3.



### Consent Form 1 (Advisors)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Name of Researcher: Revd Professor Peter Gubi

Please initial box

1. I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.
2. I agree to the research conversation being audio recorded.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before data analysis begins, without giving any reason.
4. I agree to take part in this study.
5. I understand that the data will be written up as part of a Thesis and I will not be identifiable in the Thesis.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix 4.



### Consent Form 2 (Advisors)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Name of Researcher: Revd Professor Peter Gubi

Please initial box

1. I have read the transcript of the interview to ensure its accuracy (or amend the data as appropriate).

2. I agree to quotations from my contribution to this research being used in the researcher's Thesis and in subsequent publications and presentations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix 5. Online Survey [powered by Bristol Online Survey]

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### Page 1: Introduction

#### Online Survey of Participants of Reflective Practice Groups

Hello,

I am Revd Prof Peter Gubi, Professor of Counselling and Spiritual Accompaniment at the University of Chester. I am currently conducting some research into the value of Reflective Practice Groups (RPGs). This brief online survey is part of that research.

You have been emailed by your Diocese because you have recently taken part in a Reflective Practice Group. This online survey has been sent via your diocesan office, so please be assured that you remain completely anonymous to me, and you cannot be identified from this survey. Please feel completely free to be honest in your responses. The survey should take no more than ten minutes of your time to complete and will provide valuable data for my research.

**Please be aware that by taking part in this online survey, you give consent when you submit your survey.** The data will be used in the research that I am undertaking as part of a Doctor of Theology degree at the University of Winchester (and in any publications that may arise as a result of the research). The aggregated data will also be shared with XXXXX, as part of their evaluation of their Reflective Practice Groups' experience.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?** I cannot foresee any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part, except the cost of your time.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?** The experience will give you time to reflect on your group experience, and to share your thoughts. This may contribute to something greater at research and policy level, in enhancing ordination training and in the support of newly ordained clergy.

**What if something goes wrong?** I cannot foresee anything going wrong. I will do everything within my ability to ensure your confidentiality. However, if you are not happy with any aspect of the research process, please raise it with me. If you are still not happy, you may raise it with my Research Supervisor, Professor Neil Messer, at the University of Winchester.

<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology-religion-and-philosophy/staff%20profiles/pages/drneilmesser.aspx>

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential, and how will my data be stored?** Your identity is not known to me as the researcher, so your anonymity is assured. The data will be stored securely in locked premises, and kept encrypted on



a password protected computer. Only I, my Research Supervisor, and XXXXX will have access to the data (but not to who has generated the data, as the data is not attributable to you). The data will be destroyed (shredded or electronically deleted) after five years, in keeping with the data protection act.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?** The completed research will be stored (bound and electronic) at the University of Winchester. The research will be disseminated in future publications and at conferences.

**Whom may I contact for further information?** I, the researcher, am: Reverend Professor Peter Gubi. My contact details are: [p.gubi@chester.ac.uk](mailto:p.gubi@chester.ac.uk)

To find out more about me: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/sps/staff/rev-pr-pm-gubi>

## Page 2: Benefits of Reflective Practice Groups

The following statements reflect the benefits of Reflective Practice Groups that have been identified in previous stages of this research. Please tick which best matches your experience:

- 1 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Feel supported  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 2 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Feel less isolated in my ministry  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 3 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Gain insight into the way I think  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 4 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Gain insight into my way of being in the world  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 5 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Gain awareness of how I impact on others  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 6 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Respect difference better  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 7 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Have a better sense of self-care  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 8 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Have a better quality of pastoral encounter with others in my ministry  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 9 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Grow theologically  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 10 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Interact better with others in my ministry  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 11 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Grow as a human being  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 12 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Trust others more

Agree

Disagree

13 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Experience my own vulnerability safely

Agree

Disagree

14 My Reflective Practice Group has enabled me to: Negotiate boundaries better in my ministry

Agree

Disagree

15 Please state if there anything else that you would like to add as being a benefit of your involvement in your Reflective Practice Group:

## Page 3: Limitations

The following statements reflect the limitations of Reflective Practice Groups that have been identified in previous stages of this research. Please tick which best matches your experience:

16 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: My difficulty in committing the time to attend regularly

Agree

Disagree

17 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: My difficulty in sharing openly with others

Agree

Disagree

18 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: My difficulty in making time to prioritise attendance

Agree

Disagree

19 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: Others in the group

Agree

Disagree

20 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: The manner of facilitation

Agree

Disagree

21 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: The structured nature of the sessions

Agree

Disagree

22 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: The unstructured nature of the sessions

Agree

Disagree

23 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: The cost

Agree

Disagree

24 I have found that my involvement with my Reflective Practice Group has been held back by: Feeling unsafe

Agree

Disagree

25 Please state if there is anything else that you would like to add as being a hindrance to your involvement in your Reflective Practice Group:

## Page 4: Final questions

Your thoughts on these final questions would be appreciated:

- 26 My earlier research indicates that Reflective Practice Groups do not seem to form part of the training for ordination experience. Do you think that having Reflective Practice Groups as part of your initial training for ministry would have been a good thing? Why/why not?

- 27 How might you theologically understand your experience of being part of a Reflective Practice Group?

**Many thanks for taking part in this survey. It is greatly appreciated. Please be aware that by taking part in this online survey, you give consent when you submit [FINISH] your survey. Because the data will be automatically aggregated electronically, it will not be possible for you to withdraw once you submit your survey by clicking on FINISH. Thank you once again.**

## Appendix 6.



### Participant Information Sheet (Focus Group)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Dear Group Member,

I understand that you are a member of a Reflexive Group (or some version of it), and that you have indicated that your Group are interested in taking part in this research. This Information Sheet will hopefully explain what is involved, but if you need further clarification, then please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details below.

#### What is the purpose of the study?

This research is part of a Professional Doctorate in Theology and Practice (DTh) that I am undertaking at the University of Winchester. I am interested in finding out about whether Reflexive Groups, defined as '*a non-directive, closed group that aims to offer opportunities for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level*', can help in developing reflexivity in those who are training for ordination, or those who have recently been ordained, towards enabling them to become better Ministers/Priests. I would be interested in exploring your view on, and experience of, this.

#### What will happen to me if I take part?

To enable this, if you decide to take part, I will arrange a time to interview your group face-to-face as a focus group at your convenience. Your written consent will be obtained through the enclosed consent form. The interview will be digitally recorded and last no more than an hour.

#### The interview will be semi-structured and be focussed around the following questions:

- Can you tell me something about the Reflexive Group that you are part of [how often do you meet, how many of you are there in the group, etc.]?
- What benefits do you think it serves [reflexively, relationally, self-care, pastoral care, preaching, theological exploration, any other]?
- How might your experience of the group be understood theologically?
- What are the hinderance factors of/in your group?
- Are they a good thing for ordinands and experienced clergy? Why/why not?
- Is there anything else you may want to add?

Once the interview is complete, the digital recording will be transcribed. Your transcript will be allocated a pseudonym or code to protect your anonymity, and any identifying features in the data will be deleted.

**Your right to withdraw without prejudice**

You have every right to withdraw from the research at any time, without prejudice, up until the point that the analysis of your data has begun. Once the analysis has begun, it will be impossible to remove your data as it will be aggregated, making your data more difficult to identify.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I cannot foresee any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part, except the cost of your time. If, for any reason, personal issues are stirred for you, I am an experienced Counsellor so I will do my best to support you in the time we are together. I am also able to furnish you with a list of therapists in your locality whom you may be able to access.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

The experience will give you time to reflect on your group experience, and to share your thoughts. This may contribute to something greater at research and policy level, in enhancing ordination training and in the support of newly ordained clergy.

**What if something goes wrong?**

I cannot foresee anything going wrong. I will do everything within my ability to ensure your safety and confidentiality. However, if you are not happy with any aspect of the research process, please raise it with me. If you are still not happy, you may raise it with my Research Supervisor, Professor Neil Messer, at the University of Winchester.

<http://www.winchester.ac.uk/academicdepartments/theology-religion-and-philosophy/staff%20profiles/pages/drneilmesser.aspx>

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential, and how will my data be stored?**

The fact that you are taking part in the research, and everything that you share, will remain confidential. In the unlikely event that Child Protection issues are raised, I may have to alert Social Services or Police, but otherwise, what you share will form part of the data which will be anonymised by use of a pseudonym or code. The data will be stored securely in locked premises, and kept encrypted on a password protected computer. Only I, and my Research Supervisor, will have access to the data. The data will be destroyed (shredded or electronically deleted) after five years, in keeping with the data protection act.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The completed research will be stored (bound and electronic) at the University of Winchester. The research will be disseminated in future publications and at conferences.

**Whom may I contact for further information?**

I, the researcher, am: Reverend Professor Peter Gubi.

My contact details are: [p.gubi@chester.ac.uk](mailto:p.gubi@chester.ac.uk)

To find out more about me: <http://www.chester.ac.uk/sps/staff/rev-pr-pm-gubi>

***Thank you for your interest in this research.***

## Appendix 7.



### Consent Form (Focus Group Members)

#### Exploring the value of Spiritually Reflexive Groups in the training of ordinands and in supporting newly ordained persons in ministry

Name of Researcher: Reverend Professor Peter Gubi

Please initial box

1. I have read and understood the participant information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.
2. I agree to the research conversation being audio recorded.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before data analysis begins, without giving any reason.
4. I agree to take part in this study.
5. I understand that the data will be written up as part of a Thesis and I will not be identifiable in the Thesis.
6. I agree to quotations from my contribution to this research being used in the researcher's Thesis and subsequent publications and presentations.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature



# Groups for Growth

**Are you involved in pastoral ministry in your parish or chaplaincy, or in the place where you work? If so, read on! Consultation and Support Groups exist for people like you.**

**Rev. David Page**

A commitment to grow to maturity is something all Christians take on. To make progress on the way, we need each other, and church leaders, lay or ordained, know that without this growth their ministry will die. No one is helped if, at the age of fifty we are still living out of remembered insights from thirty years before.

Ministers need to grow, and among the resources they can tap into are Consultation and Support Groups. These have been running in Southwark Diocese for the last thirty years. They bring together people who have pastoral responsibilities - clergy, their wives and husbands, chaplains, SPAs and Readers.

You can't offer pastoral support to other people unless you make an effort to understand them. Equally, you can't do it unless you make an effort to understand yourself. Being a pastor means getting involved, and all sorts of emotions are stirred up by the encounter. We often don't react rationally to what we are told. We get angry, irritated, anxious or exhausted. Other people's painful memories can stir up our own. The stories they tell can reverberate other stories that are powerful for us in ways we don't quite understand. Many times we notice the symptoms but we don't give ourselves time to think about the cause.

Consultation and Support Groups are set up on the premise that these things happen to us; that it is better for the people we pastor if we try to understand what's going on; and that talking things through with the Group will help us to do it. We learn to see beyond our blind spots and grow in the process.

A typical group has eight members - usually people who don't have a working relationship outside - and two facilitators. Absolute confidentiality is the rule. Meetings are weekly and last for an hour and a half; ten sessions a term; thirty in the course of a year. People sometimes blanch at the thought of making such a time commitment, but the personal growth and insight that come from membership make it time well spent. The people we minister to will certainly get the benefit.

When someone brings a piece of work, Group members listen, ask questions, and reflect on what has been said. Talking things through with people who are listening carefully, and who won't rush to judgement or muscle in with advice is enormously creative.

The Group is a safe place to challenge and explore our perceptions: integrating experiences that we hadn't linked together before. Blurred impressions come into focus. You can build up a store of other people's insights and experiences that will inform your own, and practise different approaches to the pastoral encounters which lie just ahead.

Christians believe in community because we know that the journey is harder and poorer when we struggle on alone. When we share, everyone is stronger, and the Good News goes forth at more depth. Consultation and Support Groups reflect this truth. Ministry is often an isolated affair. To know that you have other people with parallel experience backing you up makes a very big difference.

Consultation and Support Groups are there to nourish and enrich our pastors and carers. When that happens, there are benefits all round. There are groups accessible from all parts of the Diocese.

**For more information, contact David Page on 0171-223-5953.**

## Appendix 9.

### Embedded reflective practice

This Appendix contains the narrative data that was provided by the TEI Principals on the places in their curricula where reflexivity is developed.

All of the TEIs who responded (n=11), stated that reflective practice is integrated into several parts of the curriculum (e.g. theological reflection, pastoral care, spiritual formation), where the development of self-awareness is encouraged. TEI1 expected students to practice theological reflection throughout their training, having introduced the principles and some methods and tools early on in this. In their classes, students undertake individual and group exercises. They are also often given reflections written by other people and asked to comment on their strengths and weaknesses, which will include the reflexivity developed. Students are all on placement in their own parish during their training, and have regular supervision with their incumbent (or other suitable person). The TEI also expects all students to have a spiritual director. In TEI2, students are on blended learning, in the context of their own home churches. Reflexivity is interwoven through various aspects of the course material and structure, most notably through: Supervisions with their training minister (they hold sessions for training ministers to enable them to conduct these supervisions to encourage reflection); the student convenes a local learning group, and is given guidance on questions that encourage reflexivity; some module material, especially looking at human identity, encourages reflexivity and the development of particularly Ignatian spiritual aspects of this; residential weekends integrate reflective practice throughout, both on academic and contextual (i.e. urban ministry, rural ministry, interfaith contexts, working with children, death and dying) subjects; a placement portfolio and an annual week-long residential both require students to reflect on a critical incident that happened to them, and what self-discovery comes through that. To enable reflexive learning, a variety of styles, including group work, one-to-one with training ministers, interviews, observation, and self-reflection are used. TEI3, utilises an action-reflection model (see **section 4.2.1**) throughout their provision. TEI4 identified reflexivity as being developed specifically in: Year 1: the thread of 'attending to self, to others, and to God' - one session at each residential weekend and at Easter School. This focusses on listening skills and the factors in oneself that promote and inhibit listening; Year 2: the thread on 'Leading and Participating' - one session at each residential weekend and at Easter School. This focusses on an understanding of groups through theoretical input and exercises; and Year 3: the thread of experiential group work - one session at each residential weekend and at Easter School. In a series of unstructured sessions, individuals are invited to reflect on how they interact in groups. In addition, students complete a learning journal after every training event, which asks them to consider their personal reactions, their theological

formation, and the development of their skills. For TEI5, journals form part of the formative assessment for various modules e.g. pastoral theology and leadership. Spirituality is often taught in pastoral groups encouraging reflexivity. Prayer triplets and sharing are also encouraged. Theological reflection is practised corporately in pastoral groups encouraging both reflectivity and reflexivity. Pastoral groups also have time for other discussions and formation with a tutor present encouraging reflexivity. Open space groups or action learning sets have run alongside their part-time course and one module. All ordinands take a portfolio module assessing reflexivity. In addition, all ordinands receive regular supervision from experienced incumbents encouraging both reflexivity and reflectivity. All ordinands meet with personal tutors twice a term to reflect together on personal formation. Ordinands also complete the self-assessment in preparation for Bishops' reports. Theological reflections form the assessment for some modules and include assessment in self-awareness and reflexivity. TEI6 uses Discipleship Groups to develop reflexivity (see **section 4.2.3**). In addition, all ordinands attend a weekend away together in their first term. Whilst not a silent retreat, the weekend is designed to give opportunity for reflection on interactions and processes in which reflexivity can take place at a psychological, relational and spiritual (theological) level. There is input via a number of talks. There is space in these for discussion and reflection as the year group bonds. All Leavers attend a Leavers' weekend – this is a silent retreat with sessions from an invited retreat director. There is space to enable people to reflect and pray. Every year they have at least two Quiet Days. The institution offers a course on preaching, and students assemble a preaching portfolio which is specifically aimed at helping students to be reflective practitioners of preaching. They write a preaching journal and offer a critical analysis of a videoed sermon. Other modules have either group or individual work for reflection, e.g. Mission and Evangelism, Introduction to Aspects of Pastoral Care, Introduction to Spirituality and Discipleship, and Reflective Practice in Context (Short), all of which are compulsory modules for their ordinands.

TEI7 teaches several modules that have reflexivity as a major and specific component, e.g. Foundations for Theology and Reflective Practice; Foundations for Ministry & Mission; and Reflective Practice in Context. They claimed to be highly committed to the importance of overtly developing reflexivity, rather than assuming that students will merely pick up the required skills for effective reflexivity simply 'by osmosis' during the course of their studies. They also draw attention to reflexivity during the course of other modules, and as an aspect of their wider, formational elements, of their ministry training programmes. In TEI8, on both their non-residential ministerial course and their residential ministerial course, they teach all students to use three methods of theological reflection: critical incident analysis, the pastoral cycle, and the Education for Ministry method. All undergraduate students take part in a series of seminars in which they present

reflections, and their peers offer further reflections. Understanding one's own response to an incident and becoming aware of lessons for ministry and personal development are an integral part of this process. Postgraduate students are also expected to learn how to work with a number of models of theological reflection. All students present reflections on their placements, and lead one another in further reflection; it is an integral part of the assessment of these presentations that they include a personal response to the placement. TEI8 regards theological reflection as integral to the training process and as one important key for enabling the reflexive dimension of personal and ministerial formation. For their residential ministerial course, they offer all students who lack previous training and/or experience in attentive listening, a short course in listening skills. Learning to 'listen to one's self', i.e. becoming aware of the way one is responding to a pastoral conversation, is an integral part of this course. For both their non-residential ministerial course and their residential ministerial course, they include a leadership element of the Ministry and Mission, and Developing Ministry and Mission in Context modules, which involves preparatory reading for each teaching session, including personal reflection exercises on subjects like experience of change and exercising power. Teaching sessions on several aspects of mission for Mission and Evangelism and Foundations for Mission and Ministry in Context modules include class time given to exploring students' previous experience of, and response to, a variety of approaches to mission. Introduction to Pastoral Care modules includes teaching on a variety of aspects of human development, some of which impact on the students' understanding of their own development. All students keep placement journals in which they are expected to record their observations of themselves as well as of the placement situations. Edited extracts from these journals form part of the assessed work for several units (pastoral care; theological reflection). Several of their themed study weeks in which all residential ministerial course students participate (e.g. Death, Dying and Bereavement; Ageing and Spirituality; Marriage and Family Life; Conflict Transformation) include presentations and exercises that require students to become aware of their own experience and responses.

TEI9 uses various versions of the Pastoral Cycle with their students, offering them a range of models for theological reflection. This is both taught within an introductory module to theology, used within the Formation Groups (see **section 4.2.4**), and developed during residential weeks which take place once a year. TEI10 has a theological reflection module at the beginning of the programme which explores models of reflective practice; this is contextualised in practice through placement and with supervision from placement supervisors. Reflexivity is central to this as students are encouraged to reflect on their own responses to their experience and practice as well as on the practice itself. All of their practical theology modules use reflective practice and require assessments in which students attend to their own presence in their practice; they talk consistently about 'writing

themselves into' practical theology assignments; assignments in practical theology are assessed for reflexivity. They teach two models, pastoral cycle (and its derivatives) and communal spiritual discernment, and give students the opportunity to practice these. They are very different approaches and they give students the opportunity to explore their reflexivity in very different ways – one which is broadly based on an individual construction of knowledge (reflective practice) and one which is based on a situated learning approach that employs a more communal epistemology. They consider that students need both the contextual performative approach which engages with the 'other', and an approach which helps them stand back and critique what they are a part of. These two generate different types of reflexivity which are complementary. TEI10 uses reflective practice groups in which the students take responsibility for the reflective process and through attending to one another. These help in the development of each other's reflexivity. They train supervisors in supervision as far as they are able, and specifically ask them to give time to helping students to explore their own responses. They talk a lot about the 'liminal journey' in respect of this, but success in this is mixed. They introduce students to journaling, and require students to experiment with this as part of their assessments. At TEI11, the development and practice of reflexivity is an element pursued throughout the curriculum as one of the programme's goals. At least one assignment for each module requires such reflexivity in relating course material to ministerial practice; the pastoral and contextual theology teaching and the associated placements demand that students consider not only their pastoral responsibilities and the strategies for fulfilling them but also their personal formation as ministerial candidates. Spirituality modules, along with the planning and leading of worship, ask that students engage in practices unfamiliar to them, challenge their existing patterns of practice, and that they take care to reflect on the personal changes that occur in consequence. The students at TEI11 use journal writing, small group discussion, reflective practice reports, regular assignments explicitly requiring reflexivity, a tutorial system that requires reflection on personal change and learning, placements in which students work in unfamiliar ecclesial contexts, recruitment for an ecclesially, socially, and educationally diverse student body, peer group feedback for preaching, etc., and mission projects that include requirement for reflection on group formation and working. These contribute to the development of reflexivity in their ordinands.